

"A riveting adventure through life and psyche that proves hard to put down"

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW BOOKWATCH

LOVE FOR A DEAF REBEL

DERRICK KING



*Schizophrenia
on Bowen Island*

Reader Comments

I have been moved in so many ways by your story. You have made me laugh, and you have made me cry. I am in awe and want you to know your story has taken me to places inside of me to remember that nothing lasts and we must cherish things as they are. The light and the dark, the good and the bad, are intertwined. Looking back at our adventures and experiences, we see the truths in our life.—J.P.

This book is powerful! It is amazing. I loved it! I read the book three times, and it has been in my thoughts since my first reading. The author put his heart and soul into this book. His telling of the journey taken by Pearl and him is brilliant, heart-wrenching, and insightful. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed all the characters; I feel like I know them. I can't even imagine the amount of work this book required. Thank you so much for writing it and sharing it.—D.G.

I couldn't put this book down. What crazy shit the author went through—he lived the lives of a thousand men!—D.B.

This book is fascinating and moving, an exotic love story however contorted the love. New Pearl was there all along, the alter-ego lying in wait to be discovered after the honeymoon. The author truly loved Pearl and was heartbroken by her ultimate failure to recognize his true love; how sad for her indeed! I hope this book goes viral.—P.W.

The author has done a masterful job of documenting Pearl's journey. Schizophrenia is very complicated and not easily understood. The book would be very helpful to anyone with a schizophrenic family member or friend.—G.G.

This book is fascinating. The author is a good writer and my goodness but he has had an eventful life. We have all had our sagas of love lost, and it is unfortunate that each generation has to learn the lessons again with all the heartache.—I.V.

The book pulled me in right away. The author knows how to capture detail and make the story interesting; readers would like to be there with them. It is touching how the author never stopped loving Pearl despite everything that happened. He tried to make things work instead of rushing towards divorce like she did.—D.L.

Press Reviews

The bond that grows between strangers living in two worlds is compellingly described, bringing revelations about prejudice, acceptance, handicaps, and equality. Deafness and schizophrenia are seen through intense love and personal growth that brings a “you are here” feel in a way few memoirs achieve. The role of friends and family is examined as King stands by her while her mental health collapses. Anyone interested in mental illness or in the interactions between deaf and hearing lovers will find the book infused with a passion that makes it a riveting adventure through life and psyche that proves hard to put down.—Midwest Book Review Bookwatch
<http://donovansliteraryservices.com/june-2021-issue.html#lft>

King’s powerful memoir is about the difficulty of dealing with a loved one’s mental illness and disability, and how falling in love with a deaf woman changed his life. His love for Pearl is well conveyed in concise, accessible terms that capture the challenges of falling in love with a person who sees the world in a different way. The coverage of the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse that she experienced is sobering. King’s narration strives to authentically capture his feelings in the moment. Rating: 4 out of 5.—Clarion Reviews Foreword
<https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/love-for-a-deaf-rebel/>

This candid account of the author’s marriage to a deaf person vividly details their motorcycle adventure to Guatemala and life on Bowen Island. This poignant love story is well written and becomes a platform for facts about the life of deaf people, also delving into issues such as schizophrenia, blindness, and diabetes. Those interested in the stress that disabilities can place on relationships may wish to read this. Rating: Recommended.—The US Review of Books
www.theusreview.com/reviews-1/Love-for-a-Deaf-Rebel-by-Derrick-King.html

King’s love story and memoir opens when he is approached by Pearl, a charismatic deaf woman. Their chat, scribbled on napkins, flows easily, and friendship blossoms. He learns sign language. They move together to isolated Bowen Island, sharing a life of livestock and ferry rides, where her behavior becomes increasingly erratic. King tells this honest and emotional story in crisp, quick prose, with insights and slight suspense, respecting Pearl’s story right up to its bittersweet finish.—Publisher’s Weekly Booklife
booklife.com/project/love-for-a-deaf-rebel-schizophrenia-on-bowen-island-55735

LOVE FOR A DEAF REBEL

DERRICK KING

*Schizophrenia
on Bowen Island*

Love for a Deaf Rebel: Schizophrenia on Bowen Island
© Copyright 2021 by Derrick King

Print Edition, Unabridged and Illustrated
ISBN 978-981-18-0574-5
Published in Singapore by Provenance Press



Pearl is priceless, so this book is not for sale. This book is published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (International) License. Everyone is free to download, print, copy, search, reuse, modify, redistribute, or link to this book provided this book is cited and the author is identified. For license details: creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data
Name(s): King Derrick.

Title: Love for a deaf rebel : schizophrenia on Bowen Island / Derrick King.

Description: Singapore : Provenance Press, [2021]

Identifier(s): OCN 1243509349 | ISBN 978-981-18-0574-5 (pdf) |

ISBN 978-981-18-0575-2 (ebook)

Subject(s): LCSH: King Derrick--Marriage. | Love. | Man-woman relationships. |

Deaf--Marriage. | Mentally ill--Marriage. | Deaf--Family relationships. |

Schizophrenics--Family relationships.

Classification: DDC 306.7--dc23

“Never Comes The Day” words and music by Justin Hayward © Copyright 1969 (Renewed), 1970 (Renewed) Tyler Music, Ltd., London, England. TRO-Essex Music International, Inc, New York, controls all publication rights for the USA and Canada. International copyright secured. All rights reserved including public performance for profit. Used by permission.

This is a true story. Most written conversations are abridged from transcripts. Signed and oral conversations are recreations from notes and records. The author tells the story as he experienced it, with Pearl’s earliest history revealed last. The names of living persons have been replaced by pseudonyms.

To Pearl

*Sometimes with one I love, I fill myself with rage,
for fear I effuse unreturn'd love;
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love—
the pay is certain, one way or another;
(I loved a certain person ardently,
and my love was not return'd;
Yet out of that, I have written these songs).*

Walt Whitman
Sometimes with One I Love, 1860

Contents

1984: Passion	1
Feb: Radar Under the Clock	1
Apr: The First Time I Was Raped	9
We're Writing a Book	22
May: Shall We Be Magnificent Couple?	27
I Dream About You	35
Jun: A Silent Movie	46
Snowslide	56
Jul: Pearl Hits Bull's-Eye, Moves In	63
Sep: Guatemala by Motorcycle	72
Oct: Cocaine, My Life Is Fulfilled	89
Dec: Engaged, The End of the World	94
1985: Adventure	104
Jan: Leisure with a Quartz Watch	104
Mar: The Benefits We Discussed	119
Apr: Moving to Bowen Island	122
May: Housebroken	132
Jun: One Shot Can't Be Traced	136
Ten Acres Enough	142
Jul: Like Ricotta But Firmer	154
Aug: Trout Lake Farm	164
Oct: Men Can't Be Trusted	170
Nov: Rotate Windows, Get Married	178
1986: Newlyweds	184
Jan: Winter Wonderland	184
Mar: Rich Couple's House	189
May: Prairie Oysters	196
Jun: Like Shooting Pigs in a Sty	199
Jul: World Exposition	203
Sep: Alberta School for the Deaf	209
Oct: You Tried to Kill Me!	217
Dec: First Anniversary	221

1987: Metamorphosis	225
Jan: Pearl Calls Chicago	225
Mar: I Want a Baby	227
May: Fuck You, Pig	230
Jul: Unhappy Campers	232
Aug: Borrowed Semen	235
Sep: Death by Television	239
Oct: Book Panic, Car Terror	245
Dec: Arrest Derrick!	249
Everything Is Different	258
1988: Paranoia	266
Jan: Where Are the Bullets?	266
Helping Pearl Out	275
Feb: How Did You Find Me?	283
Mar: Your Little Black Book	286
Jun: Hearing Strange Stories	291
Aug: Psychological Abuse!	293
Nov: Letters From Amsterdam	297
1989: Divorce	299
Feb: Someone Switched the Diamonds	299
Jul: Twice Divorced	304
Nov: All the Awful Things	304
1990: Estrangement	307
Mar: Absolved from Guilt	307
May: You Wrote Me Three Letters	308
2020: Clarity	310
Life on Her Own	310
Fabrication of Reality	313
Bequest of Deafness	317
Jinx of Psychosis	320

1984: Passion

Feb:

Radar Under the Clock

I walked into a roar of conversation, bought sushi, and shuffled through the lunchtime chaos of the Pacific Centre Food Court looking for a seat. Umbrellas and overcoats dripped water onto the white tile floor.

A black-haired woman sat under the clock, her back to the wall, scanning the crowd with radar eyes. Her porcelain face, brown eyes, and high cheekbones gave her face a long-distance presence, yet her elegance was neutralized by a brown dress and a perm. She wore no makeup or jewelry. Her radar locked on to me as I looked for a seat.

The seat opposite her became vacant. I elbowed my way through the crowd and sat down. I was wearing a blue suit with a white shirt and a silk tie; like most bankers, I only removed my jacket on the hottest of summer days or when I was wearing a suit with a vest.

I loosened my tie. I ate while she studied me with the barest hint of a smile. Her drab style contrasted with the gaudy colors and big hair of the 1980s. I smiled at her and looked away. She looked at me while she ate fish and chips and sucked down the last of a Coke with a gurgle.

“What are you staring at?” I finally said.

She pointed to her mouth and then to her right ear.

“Are you deaf?” I said, at first puzzled and then surprised.

She nodded.

I took the gold Cross pen from my suit pocket, picked up a napkin, and wrote, “*Spicy horseradish.*”

I turned my napkin to face her. She read it and smiled at me as if she expected me to write more.

“I wondered why you looked at me. I never met a deaf person before.”

“I watch lips. If you speak and I ignore you will think I am rude. I don't want hearing to think that deafies like me are rude.”

1984: Passion

“Can you lipread?” I said.

The woman shook her head.

“Most people never look at each other. They only look at the floor. That’s why I spoke to you.”

She smiled and wrote, *“We are 200,000 deafies in Canada. Our language is ASL—American Sign Language.”*

“I’m getting an ice cream. Do you want one?”

The black-haired woman scribbled on the tattered napkin and pushed it across the table like a croupier.

“Almond.” She smacked her lips, grinned, and put the napkin in her purse.

I bought two ice cream cones at Baskin-Robbins and stuffed a handful of napkins into my pocket. The music of Madonna played in the background. We sat on a bench in the mall and continued to write. I noticed her fingernails were badly chewed.

“Congenitally deaf?”

The woman shrugged.

“Born deaf?”

“Mother had measles at 4 months pregnant. Lucky not 2 months or I am blind and deaf.”

I smiled. *“That’s life.”*

“That’s me. I accept my deafness. My children will be hearing.” She looked at her watch. *“I go back to work. Nice to meet you.”*

The woman stuffed the napkin into her purse and disappeared into the crowd as I watched her walk away.

My secretary dropped a dossier on my desk as I looked out my office window at Vancouver harbor and the coastal mountains. I worked in an offshore branch of a foreign bank that specialized in project finance, trade finance, and private banking for foreign nationals.

“Derrick, wake up! This just arrived from counsel. Rokus finished subdividing our collateral on Bowen Island. He’ll sell half the property and pay us out.”

“You caught me daydreaming.”

“What about? Trudeau’s resignation? You met your dream girl?”

“After Eugénie, I don’t dream about girls. I shared a lunch table with

1984: Passion

a deaf woman today. We talked with a pen by writing on a napkin.”

“How *dreadful!* Imagine not being able to hear anything!”

“Well, she looked normal and contented to me ... no visible defects.”

“Did you get her number?”

“Sure—so I can call her on the telephone.”

She blushed. “Oh, my God, I can’t imagine! The bell ringing next to her, and the poor thing can’t even hear it!”

I went back to the food court just before noon. The silent woman was sitting at the same table under the clock. She looked up from a plastic plate of Chinese food and waved at me. I bought food and squeezed through the crowd to her table. She smiled. I sat down. She looked at me expectantly; before the age of smartphones, people didn’t stare at electronic screens throughout their lunch break. She seemed to be about my age, almost 30, yet her face hadn’t a wrinkle.

I reached into my suit and pulled out a few neatly folded sheets of office paper and my pen.

“I remember you.”

She put down her chopsticks and wrote, “Ha-ha.”

“How are you today?”

“Well I feel bothered about my real estate. I must see the lawyer after work. I have a condo in New Westminster I bought 2 years ago. I don’t want to live there now so I rented. The bylaws said that I can rent it by applying the form ‘D.’ I did! Shit! The strata order me to pay fines. They don’t allow renters. Mother suggest me to move back there until my condo sells. Now I am stuck to pay mortgage and apartment rent.”

I was happy that she didn’t like small talk. I didn’t like it either.

“You must have a good job to afford two places.”

“I work at the post office. I sort mails. Managers and union fight. Something not nice to work there. Good pay but I have Medical Lab Technician two year diploma at St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute. They have interpreters there.”

“Then why do you work in the post office now?”

“After my divorce I come back to Canada to Vancouver because

1984: Passion

many deafies in Vancouver. I can get a good job. But no hospital would hire me. All refused me because I am deaf. I got a temporary job at the post office.” She turned the paper to face me so I could read it and then took it back and continued writing. “Six years ago. Temporary. Ha!” But I am lucky to have education and job not to be unemployed. Most Deafies are unemployed—80%. 1/3 quits high school. I think people who discriminate should go to jail.”*

“I studied too. Electronics engineer, but I work for a Dutch bank. Boring but better than a post office job! I study at night school for fun, Spanish now. I will start an MBA in September. I want to work in another country. I taught at night school, so a teacher and a student at the same time. My name is Derrick King.”

“Pearl.” Pearl pointed at herself, looked up to check the time, and mimed punching a time-clock. “I must go. 15 minute walk back and PO is strict. Maybe the union will strike this week. Then I will not see you. Bye!”

I usually ate at the same time and place when I didn't have appointments. Whenever I went to the food court, just before noon to beat the rush, Pearl was sitting under the clock, and we started writing.

“I met my husband at TVI in St. Paul but he is from North Dakota.”

“How long were you married?”

“Only 9 months. Then I found him in a gay bar in Fargo after a girlfriend warns me to look in there. Yuck!” She stuck out her tongue, hung her wrist limply, and shuddered. “I lost my mobile trailer down payment from mother—my wedding gift. All my furnitures. That was 7 years ago.”

It was odd that a man would turn out to be gay nine months after he married, but I believed Pearl. Not everyone in a gay bar is gay; neither is everyone in a straight bar straight. I didn't tell Pearl I had gay colleagues

* Pearl's statistic was roughly correct. Even with modern deaf aids, the unemployment rate for deaf people remains two to three times higher than the rate for hearing people.

1984: Passion

and friends, and sometimes we drank in a gay bar near my office.

“My wife and I were married in ND too! A strange coincidence for two Canadians.”

“I wonder how long were you married?”

“7 years. That is the average Canadian marriage.”

“Who left who? And why that person left?”

“She left. She said she didn’t want to be married anymore. She said she was a feminist so she needed to be single.”

“Something more?”

“As soon as she could support herself she told me she didn’t need a husband anymore.”

“Respect is very important. Did you want her to stay?”

“Yes. We grew up together.”

“Is family important to you?”

“Woman—yes. A family doesn’t matter.”

“I want a family with Mr. Right. Children are first then the husband is second. Important!”

“I’m Mr. Write! Kids need a house, not an apartment. Nowadays that means two incomes.”

“Two incomes until children are small. Then wife should be home to be mother if husband will afford. Depends on location.”

“Yes. Where do you live?”

“Kitsilano near the beach.”

“Me too, on 2nd Ave. 2125.”

Pearl hesitated and grinned. “2168.”

“That is the other side of the street!” We stared at each other. “Another strange coincidence.”

A man with a gray comb-over was sitting at the table next to us. He wore several sweaters. He leaned over to Pearl with a big smile, as if we were his grandchildren, and said, “And what kind of game are *we* playing?”

Pearl shrugged blankly at him and turned to me for an explanation.

“She’s deaf, so we are writing to each other.”

He pulled back as though I’d said we had leprosy. “I’m *so sorry!*”

“Why? It’s no problem. This way we never forget what’s been said.”

1984: Passion

"I'll not slow you down." The man stood and walked away.

"What did he say?"

"He asked if we were playing a game. I told him you are deaf. Then he said he was sorry."

Pearl's face became flushed with anger. "I HATE when hearies make pity. If they don't know signs that's THEIR problem, not mine! If Hearies understand deafies then we are equal!" Her pen plowed into the paper. "Hearies" was a new word to me, and I was one of "them." Pearl slurped her Coke. "Will I see you on Monday?"

"It depends on work. I like our conversations. They are like a soap opera, one episode at a time."

Pearl grinned. "You carry a paper in your pocket now."

I laughed. "Of course. It is for starting fires."

I jogged downhill in my tracksuit to Granville Island Public Market past sailboats and luxury cars. As I approached the market, I spotted Pearl walking with a woman. They walked past the vendors, signing. They carried their groceries in shoulder bags and backpacks to leave their hands free to sign. Some people glanced at them, and a boy pointed them out to his mother.

Pearl looked over her shoulder if she had eyes in the back of her head. She waved at me. I waved back, wiped the sweat off my brow, and walked through the crowd.

"Hello, Derrick," said Pearl's friend in a hollow, wooden voice.

"Do you know me?" I said, still panting.

She grinned. "Pearl tells me everything."

Pearl tapped her arm. "Tell him you're hard-of-hearing and can interpret," Pearl signed, as the woman interpreted for me. I was astonished at the fluidity and transparency of her interpretation; it was as if Pearl had spoken to me herself.

"So *fast!* I've never heard Pearl speak before. Only on paper."

"When people hear my accent, they don't realize I'm hard-of-hearing. They think I'm Swedish," she signed and said. She pulled her long hair back to reveal a finger-sized hearing aid behind each ear. "I'm Jodi."

1984: Passion

“Don’t interpret everything,” Pearl signed, while Jodi interpreted. Pearl grimaced when she realized I had heard her remark.

“I must be careful about what I say,” I said.

“Derrick is curious—his eyes sparkle,” signed Pearl. “Will you eat with us?”

“No. I can’t jog home with a full stomach.”

“Then rest with us. You can run faster on your way home. Ha! Today we eat Vietnamese food.”

We sat down at the Muffin Granny. Pearl put her bag in Jodi’s lap for safekeeping and went to buy food. She returned with shrimp rolls and soda. She inspected the receipt and counted her change.

“Is it hard for hearing people to learn sign language?” I asked Jodi.

“That depends on you. How badly do you want to learn?”

“That depends on Pearl”

Pearl and I became friends slowly and cautiously. We saw each other for lunch two or three times a week for two months before we progressed to our first date.

My office telephone rang. Leo, my friend since elementary school, was on the line. Leo was a cop. I walked to my office door and closed it for privacy. “Derrick, have I got a deal for you! Can you talk?”

“My door is closed, Leo. Go ahead.”

“Lever Arms brought in a batch of .32 caliber Walther PPK pistols decommissioned by the German police when they switched to the NATO standard. Only a hundred bucks. This is the smallest legal gun in Canada, great for camping—you want one of these.”

“PPK—the Gestapo used them. And Adolf Hitler and James Bond.”

“I’ve got a Beretta. You buy a Walther. I’ll sign you in at the police range. We can shoot together even though you quit the Police Reserve.”

“It would be fun to shoot again. Let me think about it.”

I didn’t have to think much. While we were in high school, I would sling Leo’s \$30 war-surplus Lee-Enfield .303 carbine and a bandolier of war-surplus cartridges over my shoulders and ride on the back of his Honda to a gravel pit, where we would shoot at soda cans. Canadian department stores sold rifles, shotguns, and ammunition in their

1984: Passion

sporting goods departments in those days; no gun permits were required except for pistols. That afternoon I walked to Lever Arms–Toys for Men and bought a Walther PPK pistol and two boxes of cartridges.

Two days later, the paperwork was completed. I put the unloaded pistol in my pocket and drove to Leo's house. He greeted me at the door with a mug of beer. "Tincture of barley malt! Did you buy it?"

"You talked me into it." I grinned as Leo stared at my jeans. "And you thought I was happy to see you." I pulled the gun out of my pocket and handed it to Leo. He released the magazine and drew back the slide to confirm it was unloaded. We walked across the green shag broadloom to an IKEA sofa. Leo's stereo pumped out rock music.

"The Police—my favorite band," Leo said, examining the gun. "A German eagle is stamped on the slide. Load it with hollow-point, but put one hard-point on top—that could save your life if someone grabs it and takes the first shot."

Leo put the gun on the table and walked out of the house. I walked to the kitchen, took an empty paper towel tube from the pile in the bottom drawer, and nibbled a hole in the side with my Swiss Army Knife. I shaped a bowl of aluminum foil around my fingertip and poked it into the hole. When Leo returned, he poured the green contents of a folded piece of paper into the bowl and lit the pipe with the lighter he kept by the fireplace. We sat down on the sofa and smoked the marijuana without speaking a word. Leo walked to the bathroom, tore up the paraphernalia, and flushed all the pieces down the toilet. Only then did Leo open the windows to let the thick smoke drift out of the house. Only then did we speak. Pot-smoking cops couldn't be too careful during the years before Canadian legalization.

Leo said, "I still can't believe how both of us were cuckolded at the same time and in the same way. Gloria and Eugénie both started affairs with married professors old enough to be their fathers. The more we invested in them, the less we could afford them. Now we have matching guns, bikes, radios, and ex-wives. Are you still missing yours?"

"I can't help it. She still feels part of me even though she's gone, like a phantom limb. That's what happens when you start in your teens."

"Then stop being a hermit. Join the reserves again, and get back in

1984: Passion

uniform. Women love a blue stripe.” Leo emptied his mug and walked to the kitchen for refills.

“You seem to be having more fun without doe-eyed Gloria than you had with her. So why are you so bitter she left?”

“Because she brought no money into our marriage, cost me a fortune in tuition fees, never worked a day, and then when she left she claimed—and got!—half my savings because it was all invested in this house. I had to borrow to stay in my own home! Is that fair?”

“Nope. Eugénie and I didn’t have any assets to fight over. I never asked her to leave, even when she told me who she was sleeping with.”

Leo shook his head. “You were a fool. I told Gloria to go.”

“When I found wet cum on the sheet and said our bed is our sanctuary, for us only, she didn’t agree. Boom! Gone in two months.”

“What did you expect? He couldn’t risk being seen in a motel, so you threatened her mentorship and jeopardized her future career. She didn’t want to find out if he only wanted her if your bed was part of the deal.”

“True. Eugénie told me that the tension of secrecy was ‘erotic,’ but she also said she was disappointed every time he ignored her in the campus hallway, walking past her as if she didn’t exist.”

“How many other girls was he ignoring at the same time? Derrick, you are too nice. You could have had him fired in a sex-for-grades scandal—that’s what I would have done.”

Apr: The First Time I Was Raped

Our first date was on 14 April—for dinner, Pearl’s invitation. With a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates, and a notepad, I walked across the street from my apartment, one of the best-kept buildings on the street, to her apartment, one of the most run-down.

I stopped at the entrance and studied the intercom. Her suite was the only unit with OCCUPIED instead of a name. I rang the buzzer. A few seconds later, the electric door opened. I walked down the corridor. *Bam!* I turned around to see Pearl peering around a steel fire door. She grinned and waved. I followed her into her one-bedroom flat, and she

1984: Passion

bolted the door behind us. Pearl accepted my gifts with a nod, a smile, and a sign I didn't understand. She handed me a corkscrew and two glasses. I poured the wine, and we raised our glasses in a silent toast.

Pearl's apartment was simply furnished and tidy. A crochet project lay on her coffee table. The wooden-cabinet TV played the news silently while white-on-black text scrolled across the bottom of its screen, decoded by the Sears TeleCaption decoder sitting on top.* I had never seen captions before, but now I could read the news line by line. I walked over to her TV and tried to turn its green tint into natural color, but its picture tube was worn out. I couldn't stand to watch a television screen like that. Pearl didn't have a videotape player, which would have cost a month's rent plus the cost of renting VHS tapes, so her only home entertainment was books and green-tinted TV.

Next to the sofa stood a bookcase with *Reader's Digest*, *Introduction to Psychology*, two *McCall's Cooking School* binders, and a *Hume Moneyletter* binder. Pearl's determination impressed me, but the latter two were sold as subscriptions, so she was wasting her money. The *Hume Moneyletter* cost about \$300 in 1980s money, \$700 in today's money. Its "Make \$1,000,000!" advertisements were everywhere. But they also said, "Do you earn \$25,000?" Pearl could only have earned half of that. She didn't seem to spend money wisely.

On her desk sat a telephone, lamp, keyboard device, and a metal box with wires leading around the room and up the wall to the doorbell panel and the bedroom. Charcoal drawings and oil paintings hung on the walls, original artwork signed by the same artist. We sat at the kitchen table and smiled at each other.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Deaf Aids. If a doorbell rings the lamps would flash slowly. If the telephone rings, the lamps would flash fast. Those pictures that my youngest sister Carol who is artist drew. She works graphic design for

* Microprocessor technology was rapidly improving the lives of the deaf in the 1980s. Closed captioning and sale of the Sears \$300 decoder began in 1980, and in 1993 closed-caption decoders were required in all new television sets.

1984: Passion

her business for companies that order.”

Silent News and the Dictionary of American Idioms for the Deaf lay on the kitchen table. I picked up the dictionary and browsed through it.

“Do you know many idioms?” wrote Pearl.

“I know all of these.”

Pearl seemed astonished. *“Idioms confuse and cause a problem to have deep English communication. Now captions teach me. Before captions I don’t understand TV.”*

The telephone rang, and the lamps in the living room and bedroom began to flash. Pearl sat down at her desk and put the telephone handset on the keyboard device, a Krown Research Porta-Printer. It beeped as green fluorescent text flowed across its one-line screen and text printed on a strip of paper, like a receipt scrolling from a cash register. Pearl typed her reply, removed the handset, and hung up the telephone.

I sat on her sofa. *“What computer is that?”*

“TTY, not computer.”

“What does TTY stand for?”

“Telecom? Device for the Deaf. TDD or TTY. Before 1980 deafies must ask hearies to phone. Now all have TTY. This is new. \$600”

Pearl’s life had been enriched tremendously by captioned television programming and independent telephone calling via TTY. Both had only been available for a few years before we met. I tried to imagine living without understanding television or being able to use a telephone.

“You only talk to people who have another TTY?”

“When you call me you can call the telephone company MRC—Message Relay Centre. You talk. MRC type to me. I notice the operator spell names wrong. I think that is due to the other person’s sounds like at the other end. I have unlisted number. I don’t want hearies to call without a TTY. Some deafies put TTY number in phone book. Bad! Thieves know owner is deaf and rape if name of woman.”

“I see a hearing aid on your kitchen shelf. You are not deaf.”

“I am deaf. I understand nothing with a hearing aid. Only noise.”

Pearl jammed her little finger in her ear and wiggled it to show me it was itchy. *“I never use hearing aid. School force kids to use. I did not like.”*

“You must have had a hearing test.”

1984: Passion

“Many. I tested myself too. I hear birds fly, stars twinkle, and sun shine. Do you understand?” Pearl smiled. *“But I can’t hear any TV without closed captions.”*

I laughed. Pearl fascinated me. She pulled a folder from her neatly labeled files and handed me an audiology report. It charted a trace of hearing at almost infrasonic frequencies in her right ear and no hearing at all in her left. Her ears were useless except to detect amplified noise.

I pointed to the chart. *“140 decibels in your good ear. You hear a jet fly like I hear a pin drop.”*

Pearl put a battery in her hearing aid, put it in *my* right ear, and turned it on. Feedback made it howl painfully loudly. I removed it.

“My breathing sounds like a vacuum cleaner!”

“Ha, your problem. Maple syrup spareribs are ready. My favorite.”

We took turns writing and eating.

“I saw signs before on the TV with a little woman in a little window in the corner. I thought that was closed captions,” I wrote.

“No. You need a special decoder to see CC. When I was a child I could not understand TV—no CC yet. Deafies don’t like signing boxes and prefer CC. Easy to read and learn English too.”

“Why do some TV shows have a little window?”

“Maybe cheaper to make? Plus children can understand. We have to wait for movies to be on video before we can watch captions.”

“When you were small did your family help you with the TV and telephone?”

“Until sisters got bigger then too selfish and busy. I am oldest. My family does not sign. In my youth no signs were allowed so today still no ASL in my family—only ‘home signs.’ Experts told family don’t learn any signs so I would force to be lipreader. Family only talk to me.”

“How much did you understand?”

“Few words. Mother always say I fool her and pretend I don’t understand. I don’t care what she _ her lips.” Pearl flapped her lips derisively.

“Was there love in your family?”

“Yes! And lack of understanding. Families with deaf today sign—

1984: Passion

happy. New way is 'Total Communication.' My children will sign."

"Your family can learn to sign now."

"My sisters and brother learn few signs recently, but mother always refuse signs. I learned nothing until I went to deaf school. There I learned to sign!"

"Your family is handicapped, not you."

"True! I wanted to hurt my mother for not signing. I think she forgives me now. I see people laughing and wonder why their laughs."

As the kettle behind me began to boil, Pearl gestured to let me know so I could turn it off. I laughed. She looked embarrassed. I realized I had been rude when I laughed.

"I forgot you hear it boil. Deafies watch pot boil for each other."

"Hearies say 'a watched pot never boils.' So deafie tea must forever." Pearl didn't understand my joke, so I pointed to the explanation in Pearl's idiom dictionary.

"We have sign idioms you can't understand. If you study ASL you can learn." Pearl carried a pile of photo albums to the table and took me on a tour of her life. Her photos were well organized and labeled. She looked happy in her photos, especially at college. "Student in college in USA where I learned to become medical lab tech."

From her photos, it was clear that attending college in a signing environment had been a happy time for Pearl, a break from the world where she couldn't speak the language on the street. I wondered what her life would have been like if she hadn't been handicapped by oral communication all through school; knowledge would have flooded into her mind instead of dripping in. I was impressed that her mother had sent Pearl abroad to study. She had far fewer photos after college.

She pointed at her ex-husband and her at college and grimaced. "No point." Pearl pointed at her nose, then at her father's matching Danny Kaye nose in a photograph. "When friends looked at my old pictures, they said that my face does not change. My Father, we were almost same. Smart man in oil company, killed in the car accident. Mother. Works in the company kitchen. Warm but not close to me. Sister Debbie is 29. Her husband is teacher. I'm closest to Sister Carol, artist, 28. Brother Kevin is 22. He is manager assistant for cement

1984: Passion

basement and fire extinguish. You can see in Yellow Pages. He is handsome and charming. He would beat up any other one who bothered me if I asked. I have a hard time to say 'Kevin.' K is invisible on lips."

Kevin was handsome, but I was surprised Pearl called a pugilist-on-call "charming."

"Try to say my name."

"Derrick," she said softly and unintelligibly, like *Eh-ih*.

"I can understand you a little bit. How do I sign 'King'?"

"Fingerspell or we invent name sign. Most people use first letter of name and describe something about personality, looks, etc. King is like this." She put her right hand on her left shoulder, formed a fingerspelled K, and curved it down to her right hip like a royal sash.

"Then like this for Derrick?" I made the same sign with a D.

Pearl laughed. "I approve your name sign. Only deafies can give a hearie a name sign. You are not suppose to change it."

She pointed at more photos. "Stepfather Art, Stepbrother, Stepsister." After an hour of exchanging gestures and notes with me, Pearl closed her last album, opened a drawer, and pulled out certificates for bookkeeping, office management, and *est* night school seminars. I recalled reading that *est* was controversial, like a cult, but I didn't know anything else about it. I was impressed by her pursuit of self-development. Pearl showed me how she had organized her drawers with expensive hanging files, each with labeled tabs—but her files were nearly empty.

"I will show you my goals now."

Pearl showed me her expensive leather-bound desktop executive agenda, almost empty.

"You have no appointments."

"Not yet." She opened a section of her agenda labeled *Things to Do Before I Die*. Her five-year plan listed a dozen goals, including *Find Mr. Right*, *Have kids before 35*, *Learn scuba*, and *Learn computers*.

I pointed at the word *scuba*. Pearl led me to her closet and yanked it open with a flourish. I was surprised to see a dry suit, air tank, regulators, mask, snorkel, knife, and gauges stuffed into it, thousands of dollars'

1984: Passion

worth of equipment. She walked back to the living room and sat at the end of the sofa with her knees together.

“Your equipment looks new. How did you learn to scuba dive? Did your instructor sign?”

“No lessons yet. I bought that scuba from deafie Elizabeth at half price. Deafies sign underwater—perfect. I will learn with Jeff who signs fingerspelling. Jeff is my hearing friend that lives nearby. I know him one year. Jeff is Jodi’s friend 15 years. He has epilepsy. He leaves his marijuana and pipe here because I don’t want him to smoke so much.”

“‘Epilepsy.’ Isn’t scuba diving dangerous with epilepsy?”

“Never heard if.”

“You care about Jeff. Was he your boyfriend?”

“A few times. Jodi liked you. Jodi is the most friendly girl than others deafies and HH. But her English is worse than mine. Sometimes I envy her ability to talk to most of hearies. Did you like Jodi?”

“Yes, but I would never go out with her, not as smart as you. Did you ask Jodi to check me out for you?”

Pearl smiled enigmatically.

“Tell me about the accident. How old were you when your father died?”

“14. Father was killed in accident with all family except me because I was in school. If my Dad is alive right now we would be multimillionaires—he worked as manager of Pacific 66, now Petro Canada. When grandfather came to get me from deaf school I know something bad happened. He told me father is dead. I did not believe. Then later believe and cry and cried. Mother was driving the car. Father was driving another car with all family except me. The car of father passed mother. Then cars hit and went from the road.” Pearl mimed two cars tumbling. “Everyone throw out of the car but only my father died. He was 35. All others went to hospital with broken and etc. Debbie was almost killed but lucky. Carol has 2 cm different in her leg. Brother 8 yrs old fly over the field and big cut. I was only family to go to a funeral with all other relatives because all other family are in hospital.”

1984: Passion

“That’s the worst story I ever heard! Why did the cars crash?”

“Exactly! Why? Newspaper and police say question my mother for cause. Also police call grandparents and neighbors and investigate my mother. They say just accident. I think not accident.”

“You believe your mother wanted to kill your father, so she caused an accident that almost killed her whole family, too?”

“I will research to find the truth. I love my father even he refused to learn signs. He permitted me to drive a car. I sit in his lap and turn the steering. Many griefs. Years to trust mother again.”

It sounded like a conspiracy theory, but perhaps there was be more to the story. Pearl began to cry, and she gulped down her wine.

“I was 17 when I was raped the first time. I was home from school. My sisters invite me to the big hearing school dance to enjoy to meet hearies and other friends there. Mom said no, but I demanded to go. Then she say yes if my sister watch me. My sister and I had good time, only dance. Clean.” Pearl voiced the word “clean,” perhaps for emphasis; it sounded like “lee.” *“Three men watched me. I went outside to parking lot, then they took me away. I screamed loud but they covered me. They took me in a car to a dirt road. Two men raped me. One man watched. Then they went away and left me to be dead. Later a car takes me to hospital.”*

Pearl unzipped her jeans and pulled her panties down to her pubic hair. I was astonished, I saw a vertical surgical scar on otherwise flawless skin. One end started a finger’s-width above her pubic hair and the other end, she pointed, went all the way down. She zipped up her jeans.

“Surgery for my womb. They put rubber to hold my womb. Sometimes I feel a ‘click.’ The hospital thought I have brain damage because I am mute. Later an interpreter comes and I tell her about my rape. Police arrested men at party. They think they are safe to rape and go back to party because I can’t talk to police. Stupid!”

“You need a ‘Medic-Alert’ bracelet or card so doctors know you are deaf. If you are in an accident you might get the wrong treatment.”

“I refuse to wear bracelet or card. Deafies are equal to hearies. There was a big trial. The man who watched was witness and confessed. Two rapists go to jail for three years. They should hang!”

1984: Passion

They are out now. That is why I have unlisted phone and etc.”

“You wrote you were raped the ‘first time.’ How many rapes?”

“The second time I was raped was by a deafie upstairs at a deaf party. I did not resist. No point to shout at deaf party. I did not call police to avoid court and threats.”

“You can survive anything. Will you come for dinner next week?”

Pearl nodded with delight. *“I will bring dessert.”*

I borrowed *The Joy of Signing*, by Lottie Riekehof, from the library. I fingerspelled “The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog” again and again. In a year, I would work through the book and learn most of its 1,500 signs. Learning American Sign Language for Pearl was one of the most satisfying things I ever did.

Pearl and I saw each other for lunch nearly every day. Our second date was a week after our first, at my place. I prepared a four-course dinner in advance so my hands would be free for conversation. My doorbell buzzed, but when I pressed the intercom button, I heard nothing but street noise, then a mumble. I pushed the door button and rushed to the lobby. Pearl followed me into my flat. I struggled to fit her coat into my closet because it was packed with motorcycle clothing and tools.

I pointed to a bottle of tequila on the counter. “Margarita?” I said, wondering if she could lipread me in context. She didn’t understand me, so I pointed to a bottle of margarita mix. Pearl licked her lips. While I mixed the drinks Pearl surveyed the articles in my one-bedroom flat. My Sansui stereo dial glowed, so she put her hand on the stereo and then on a speaker. She scanned my books and records on shelves that covered the wall. She pointed at my book *How to Make It on the Land*.

I handed her the cocktail and mimed cheers. Pearl tasted the margarita, smacked her lips, and sat down. I asked her if I could listen to my stereo while we talked, and she said that was fine because she had been watching TV while we talked.

“What do you make on the land?” she wrote, referring to my book.

“Make it’ means to support yourself from your own business.” I pointed at an antique radio and turned it on. *“It still works.”* I showed my other toys. *“I made this radio—6 years to make it. I like to make*

1984: Passion

useful things. If you have ideas for things to make your life easier or more fun, let me know! Maybe you can learn Morse code—only on/off sounds—to talk around the world.”

“Fun! I like hobbies too. And reading lots of books. I bet you don’t know how to make any crokets, needlepoints. I really like to do it by myself. I don’t like to do needlepoints that is simple. I gave away many crokets and needlepoints—few of them I kept and leaned to my sisters.” Pearl signed something, then fingerspelled, “C-a-n y-o-u f-i-n-g-e-r-s-p-e-l-l?”

“P-e-a-r-l,” I fingerspelled. My telephone rang. I ignored it and could see that Pearl hadn’t heard it. “You said something on the intercom. Did you hear me with your hearing aid?”

Pearl pulled back her hair to show me she wore no hearing aid. She mimed her face pressed against the panel, her fingers resting on it, and her struggling to feel the vibration of a voice in the loudspeaker.

“I am sorry. I have no experience with deafness.”

“Most of hearing men just want to fuck deaf women. They think deaf women are always opening their legs. That’s not true. Many hearing men were surprised how smart I am. Many times I hurt them. I believe laws should change to make hearing men to be death by hanging or electric chair or whatever. If one more hearing man do it to me, I would kill him once!” I shuddered to think how Pearl “hurt men many times,” but I knew that some men exploit vulnerable women.

“If you were my wife and you were raped, I would kill the man.”

Pearl smiled. “I dislike to tell about rapists because I still want to kill them right now. I want to kill them because I see how many hearing men do that to deaf women. 80% of deaf women get raped.* Mother

* Pearl’s shocking statistic is similar to recent research: “*The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey reported that deaf women are two to four times more likely than hearing women to experience ‘forced sex.’ 69% of deaf women experienced sexual assault.*” —Noëlle Opsahl & Lawrence H. Pick, Gallaudet University, *Understanding the Sexual Assault Disclosure experiences Of Deaf Women*. Journal of the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (2017, v. 51, n. 3, art. 3) [Abridged].

1984: Passion

was shocked when I was brave—tell her that what I wanted to do, etc. Mother worry about I go with hearies. She prefer me to stay in deaf group. I told her that deaf group bore me and where I can go and find happiness and etc. One thing I know she already told police about me. I am still going anywhere I want.”

I wondered why her mother and the police had discussed Pearl, but I didn't think to ask.

“I was a reserve policeman for 5 years. I had training in law and self-defense in night school. You should carry ‘mace.’ Police use it.”

“No, the man can hold both of my hands. Mother's friend RCMP taught me this.” Pearl mimed face-scratching and eye-poking. “When in pub I go to washroom the man try to kiss me, I hurt him. I felt good, walked away. Everyone looked at the man. I trained my sisters how to protect themself. They said, ‘Oh, brother, how strong they would be.’ But I don't enter the pub or lounge alone at night.”

“It's terrible that men have hurt you. Can you still love men?”

“You don't understand this. Well, when a stranger try to kiss me or touch my ass or whatsoever, I hurt him quickly. If I know that man, when he try to get me when he is horny, I hurt him too but less than to stranger. If I know a man—if he did, I don't hurt, but swear. If anyone who hurt me first, I would kill him once.”

“Would you like to go dancing on Saturday at Granville Island Hotel? I will wear a suit and tie.”

“I do go dancing. Most deafies like to dance. Jodi and I used to go dancing but now she has a boyfriend. My clothes are plain for signing in front of. I don't wear ‘sexy’ dresses. Sexy dress can be influence men to be horny and rape. If policeman know woman wear sexy dress they will say ‘You ask for it.’”

“If so many men are bad, doesn't that make all men seem bad?”

“My secret.”

I borrowed a new company car for our third date. Pearl's lobby door clicked open seconds after I pushed the intercom button, and she walked out in a high-necked, lilac dress. We greeted silently and walked to the car, with no other communication, until we reached the Pelican

1984: Passion

Bay restaurant in the Granville Island Hotel, one of the most expensive venues in town. Pearl's clothes weren't beautiful, but she was stunning. She pushed the wine glasses and centerpiece aside for a clear view of my hands. I took out a notepad.

"The car is from the bank. I am an engineer but I work for a bank because I believed hippies about lifestyle being important. My father worked nights and weekends and business trips for his family, but I didn't want to live like that. So I work 9 to 5."

Pearl pointed to tiger prawns on the menu, and I ordered them for both of us. *"I did not have any date since a long time,"* she wrote.

"Later there will be music so we can dance."

"The music must be loud for me. Every summer we have the deaf national reunion. Last year was in Toronto. At the party many deafies dancing hard to enjoy the beats. The hotel complained, then some deafies messed up their rooms. The hotel said no more deaf! Next year we will stay for another hotel, that's our revenge."

Pearl described this childish behavior as if it were justified. She taught me the sign for revenge, making it one of the first signs she taught me; the thumbs and forefingers looked like birds pecking at each other.

"You can hear loud noises with a hearing aid, so are you hard-of-hearing or deaf?"

"I do not understand any words with hearing aid so I prefer deaf. HH like Jodi are not deafies and not hearies. Deafies have two communities. Deaf—'D' and deaf—'d'. Difference is Deaf culture. Born deaf and not oral—Deaf culture. Deaf later so oral, or rich parents so oral—not Deaf culture. Some Deafies do not welcome HH but some hearies are worse. Some deafies have problem to have hearing friends. Some really hate hearies. You must be careful to the deaf man. Some deaf men hate when hearing man takes deafie wife because fewer deafie woman left for them. When deafies get laughed in a pub, sometimes they get more deafies and wait outside to fight their anger. Most of hearing woman don't want a deaf man—few jobs for support of wife and childrens. But deafie woman is good mother and wife. You saw the photo of my nephew. My sister gives him to me to hold when he cries."

1984: Passion

Pearl pointed at her ears and smiled to show me that deafness had advantages, too. "I want to have a boy. Boys love their mommy more." She laughed and covered her mouth. "Did others hear me?"

"No. It's too loud. If I have kids, then I prefer girls who will love their daddy."

"I want to marry a man who cares me then work together to find home business plus work-salary. Plus 1 or 2 kids. I feel worth to have them because when I get old, they can visit me and keep me company, so on. I don't care if I have deaf or hearing. Some deafies prefer deaf children, others want hearing children to be interpreter."

"Do deafies like hearing people to learn ASL?"

"Yes if the hearing has deaf relatives. Some hearies want to learn ASL then teach religion to convert deafies or want to feel important to help deafies. I really hate! A thing I want to share with you is that every hearie my deafie friends had dated had always at first say 'I want to learn sign language to communicate with you' or 'I'll go to class to learn ASL.' But not one hearie learned sign language well. When you can sign, interpret exactly. If many signs then few words, means something was missing. You must prove your trust to deafies."

"Do you have a religion?"

"I will explain my philosophy when you are ready. If there is God there is no deafness, no father death, no rape. Get it? My grandfather and grandmother pray and pray. They always go to church and waste so much time."

"I got kicked out of Sunday school when I was 12 for telling the kids that Sunday school is free babysitting for their parents. My parents never made me go to Sunday school again."

"Good story. If there is God why does he let my sisters blame me? I always get caught by my sounds. My sisters didn't want to play with me. We sincerely hated each other. Playground kids laughed at me. How can we have the same friends? I can't talk! Mother told me that I was clever than another girls and sisters and brother. She noticed that big difference. I know where she hid cookies so I ran and get cookies! One time my sister break the vase and blame me. Mother did not believe them but I said to my mother that yes I did that accident."

1984: Passion

I don't care because I am going to deaf school. So I help my sisters."

Pearl taught me the sign for bullshit (it is not in *The Joy of Signing*): the left arm on the right arm, the left hand tilted up with two fingers extended like horns while the right hand mimes falling cow pies. On Monday, three months after meeting Pearl, I registered for an evening course in American Sign Language. I was hooked.

We're Writing a Book

I telephoned Pearl for the first time. "Message Relay Centre," answered the operator. "What is the number you wish to call, and whom do you wish to reach?" It felt like I had moved to a foreign country.*

"555-1212 for Pearl."

"Please wait." I heard a keyboard tapping.

"Pearl is on the line. Go ahead, please."

"Hello, Derrick here. Are you free on Friday evening to visit me?"

"Don't forget to say 'go ahead,'" said the operator.

"Go ahead," I said. It felt like I was operating a ham radio station.

"I am free. Go ahead," the operator relayed from Pearl.

"Come at eight o'clock ... see you then. Go ahead," I said. "I'm finished talking. What do I say now?" I added.

"Don't talk to me. Talk to the other person," said the operator.

"Goodbye," I said.

"Goodbye," the operator relayed from Pearl.

Pearl arrived on time. She walked around the apartment looking at my eclectic collections as if to see if anything had changed since her first visit. I was sitting at my Arborite kitchen table to finish some work I had taken home. I was analyzing numbers on green columnar paper with a calculator, and writing longhand. Personal computers, WordStar, and

* I didn't know it then, but I was one of the first people to use Vancouver's Message Relay Centre. In May 1984, the Western Institute for the Deaf and the BC Telephone Company jointly launched *Message Relay Services*.

1984: Passion

Lotus 1-2-3 had yet to come. On Monday, my secretary would transcribe everything. I put my work aside, fingerspelled the alphabet for practice, and poured drinks. Pearl asked to see my photos, so I brought my albums from the bedroom and sat beside her as she scrutinized every one.

“So many of her. Why so many blank spaces?”

“When Eugénie left I divided our photos. I thought she would come back, and when she returned I would put her photos back in the book—I was so naïve! That’s Julian the computer man. He was a bad influence when we were 19. Drugs, motorcycles, rock music. Now he’s married. Career. Kids.”

“I was 19 when I got a boyfriend who was a drummer. He taught me to smoke marijuana. My mom got him out of our house.”

“That’s Leo the cop. That’s my grandmother and grandfather.”

“I have a photo of Grandma who was 1 1/2 years old. Grandma’s family were very wealth. Grandma has 19 or 16? (I don’t remember) sisters and brothers. Grandma refused to tell us why her family fell apart, she came from Germany. My father was French, adopted. Mom, her father is Wales, Poland, Italy and her mom is German.”

“If you are adopted in BC you can write to the government. They will tell you about your natural parents (no names). Leo wrote. I was with him when he opened the letter. He discovered his natural father was a cop, like him! His father was 60 and his mom was 20. Leo’s behavior is more like his natural father than his adoptive father.”

“Very interesting. When my father was 2 years old, I don’t remember who took him when her mother had heart attack and laid down on kitchen floor and left my father alone. My father’s father and 4 boys (brothers) were all drowned near Squamish. Then my father got killed by a car.” Pearl’s story shocked me, and the offhand way she talked about these disasters shocked me, too. It seemed weird that a young mother would have a heart attack, but I asked no questions.

“Sister Nadine, 28, student. Sister Lydia, 21, student. Brother, 26, doctor. Orthopedic Surgeon = Bone Doctor.”

“I wish BC Govt. permit deafies to work in medical lab. Edmonton permitted me to work. I resigned after 1 yr to move to North Dakota but they refused to give me a job after 1 yr. of live there because you

1984: Passion

are not citizen. I studied for nothing.”

“How old were you when you found out you were deaf?”

“My aunts watched me tear paper to feel vibrations. When was 2 Grandma told her that I am deaf but Mother refused to accept until doctor in the hospital admitted. I was 3. Mother told me that she got pregnancy and did not know that she should have a shot before getting preg.* Someone who has measles gave it to her. Many deafies are first in family.”

“I remember. You told me about her measles in the food court.”

“Funny, I did not know what was going on. At first you join to sit down on that table I sat. You are talking. I looked at you—my mind saying Oh, No—how I can tell you I am deaf? I signed ‘Good foods.’”

“No stranger smiled at me so much before. So I said, ‘What are you smiling at?’ You answered me with gestures. How did I react?”

“You stop talking with your lips like shock! I don’t talk to you because I have had bad time to talk to hearies who are not smart. In shopping I asked a saleswoman to find different color. I showed her some ‘red’. She didn’t understand. So stupid! One time a man was really stupid! He didn’t know what to do about my drink so he gave it to me free! In the market, the man is very idiot. I was lined up. He tried to make me to like him. That’s what I saw his face and got sick! I acted rude to him and walked snobbings. Stupid people hesitate then walk away. My mind kept telling that ‘That’s their problem.’”

“It is their problem. Stupid people assume everyone can hear. They think, ‘What’s wrong with her?’ Then they panic.”

“In Edmonton in downtown a deafie told us that the store didn’t let her in and buy something. She wanted to show us where the store was. So we went there. All of us were 18 to 20. We made good plans before entering the store. Then all deaf girls entered. The lady told us to get out. So we swore her. When we got out, then deaf boys threw to break the front windows. We stayed there. We just played as

* This wasn’t true—rubella vaccine did not become available until 1969, 16 years later.

1984: Passion

pretended to want to go in. Cops came and talked to us. We told them no reason to get out by nut woman. Then cops wanted all of our names and told us that don't worry we will win in court anyway. Other times all deafies discussed at deaf club about stores that they are discriminate. We agreed to be sure we can stand at their door so people (hearie) hardly get in. I enjoy dumb hearies."

"Dumb also means 'can't talk."

"No, mute means 'can't talk.' Some deafies don't accept 'mute.' We prefer 'deaf' because most can speak few words. If people say 'deaf and dumb' we say 'hearing and dumb.' The doctor put 'Deaf and Mute' on my file. I forced him to correct it! When we sign everyone always stare so then a deaf guy asked them to give us money. That made them go away!"

"Is your ex-husband deaf?"

"Hard-of-hearing like Jodi. We open up and talk deeply about something. She or I don't feel safe to talk to another friend. I am going to take Scuba lessons. After scuba lessons I would look something and give it to my brother. My brother has a big aquarium (fish). He is president of Aquarium Club."

"Virgil teaches scuba, but he needs 3 people for a class. Do you have many hearing friends?"

"About 10. Deafies—lots but I don't want to get close, just see them once in 2 wks. Many deafies have problems. They don't know how to create themselves. I don't like deafies who are negatives."

Injustice and revenge were forming a pattern in Pearl's stories. Everyone generalizes, but the way Pearl talked about her deaf community surprised me, varying from disparaging to boastful depending on whom she was basing her generalizations at the time. She didn't seem to see deafie and hearies as equals but as "us vs. them." Even so, despite the language difficulties and against her mother's advice, Pearl said she preferred to spend her time with hearing friends. The hearing world had more appeal for her than the deaf world, yet it seemed to be a love-hate affair. I wondered if Pearl and I might bridge our worlds and, in some small way, help to bring them together.

1984: Passion

Pearl walked across the street to my condo. We were constantly dropping in on each other for tea. We scribbled like madmen, jumping from one topic to another, as we tried to get to know each other, but we were cautious still just friends.

"I talked to my friend Ron. He got training on computer at work. He was lucky—he did not go to college, or BCIT, etc. He told me how to get training is going to BCIT but I think I would like to take a course through correspondence. Open Learning Institute is only way I can take because I don't have to wait for interpreter!"

"I will try to help you when you know what you want. I like to study, too. I take a sailing course next month. 10-meter yacht with 5 people for one week. Have you been on a sailboat?"

"Yes. Once I paid to learn how to do it on sailboat. 4 times I went to a ride. I think that the motorboat is bigger than yacht but the yachts have long length. Motorboat are more wider than yacht."

Sometimes I seemed to be talking to a child, but I knew simple English does not mean simple thinking—my Spanish was no better.

"Where are you going on holidays?"

"I'll visit grandma and grandpa for few days. Then stay at Uncle's ranch to ride on the horse. I am going to learn to jump the fence on the horse this year."

Pearl caught me staring at her. *"It's amazing how much your face can say."*

"Body language," she wrote with a smile. *"Do you seldom go to Bimini Bar? Jodi and I go there once a while after health club."*

"Not often. It's a place where men and women go to 'pick up'."

"We don't get bothered. Men are thinking we are weird because of ASL. We are peace. We don't drink very much. Ex-boyfriend Eddy was very alcoholic. I lived with him almost 2 yrs. ago. I did not like his way. Bad influence to children in future. He's my good friend now. I think I meet wrong men."

Pearl talked like a planner and wanted a family, but she'd been celibate for seven years. The sexual history she shared with me included rapists, a homosexual, an alcoholic, and an epileptic. If we are known by the company we keep, what was I to think of her? I thought she, like I

1984: Passion

had been unlucky in love, and I hoped our luck would change together.

“You’ll make a wonderful wife and mother to some lucky guy.”

Pearl beamed. *“I believe that I’ll be.”*

“What if you met a guy you can love but who didn’t want kids?”

“Forget him for boyfriend but keep him as good friend for yrs. My good friend Tena got married to UBC student long time ago. Now her husband is a manager for public transit. They have 3 kids. Very happy marriage. All family can sign. They have a nice huge house. Few deaf women got married to hearies but many deaf men got married to hearing women, some interpreters. Divorces (some). Some unhappy, jealous husbands. Hearing women are not patient for their deaf men. Hearing men are patient more and more peace for them because hearing men have pressures from work, then go home and have quiet and peace with deaf wife. Get it? But hearing women signs better than hearing men.”

Later, I would meet Tena’s family. They were just as Pearl had described them, a role model for other deaf-hearing marriages.

“How do deafies talk with their husband when the lights are off?”

“We hold our hands or put one hand to spell out on the chest or whatever. Deaf boyfriend don’t know how to romance. I hardly explain you. One day you will know what it look like when you see deafies couples. I can’t tell you because you have no experiences, etc.”

“So you want a deaf boyfriend or husband?”

“I don’t want to have deaf boyfriend unless he know how to make real life. Deaf men are isolated and don’t want to see real life from outside. My family never stop teaching me English. Many deafies and HH’s family and relatives don’t teach them English.”

“You are probably smarter. All these notes—we’re writing a book.”

“Are you free Saturday? I would invite you for a dinner if you’re free that day. I already decide what meals we will eat.”

May: Shall We Be Magnificent Couple?

I brought a bouquet, a half-bottle of wine, and plastic glasses to our food

1984: Passion

court rendezvous, even though it was illegal to drink it there. Pearl handed me a letter, looking self-conscious. Her script was neat and her grammar was better than in our speed-writing conversations.

8 May 1984

Dear Derrick.

What are you doing these days, ha!

I feel a little nervous to write this letter to you. This is a long letter for you to read. You will correct my grammars. I hope you will give me 'A' ha! (I am kidding). What bothers me is that I need more vocabulary. I can't help it because I don't hear many vocabulary from radio, people's conversations, so on. That's why I prefer to go outside from deaf groups like being with you. ASL which doesn't have some vocabulary, usually express with our body and faces. We (you and me) can trade you experiences, ha. Shall we be magnificent couple?

I'll learn to say 'Derrick' correctly one day.

I quit to assist the accounting at Vancouver Area Centre* every Wednesday after my work because I usually got tired while Jodi and I went to health club and have aerobic after my assisting the accounting. Plus I did not eat until 9:00 p.m. That's why I quit. But one day I'll go back to be volunteer there again. I really like to do accounting but I have sometimes frustrate to keep in touch with someone who make mistakes on accounting.

I am talking about the career I have researched. I found that three different careers that are interested to me.

1. Architecture.
2. Financial or investment analyst.
3. Computer programmer or operator.

Architecture is more easier for me to be successful. It doesn't require to communicate very often. For example, people write down on lists what they want. Then I have lots of imaginations in

* Pearl was assisting "est." "Car salesman Jack Rosenberg became Werner Erhard, who created Erhard Seminars Training in 1971, marketed as lower-case 'est.' It was labeled a cult that exploited its followers. Authoritarian trainers enforced rules, required applause after participants 'shared,' and deemphasized reason in favor of 'feeling and action.' The last course was held in 1984."—Wikipedia, *Erhard Seminars Training*.

1984: Passion

my mind and draw and even I raise kids at home. During my drawing, I can feel _____. Plus I sell jades to deafies all over North America. Perfect for me and make \$ too. I think architecture is probably suited to my interests and few skills.

Analyst is more difficult to know if I'll be successful or not. Because for example, if I am financial analyst, I would have required to communicate with people often. I also would hardly find more deafies who need me to do for them because there are so small group of deafies across the Canada and even in BC.

I feel that architecture and computer programmer are more interesting in learning more. I haven't decided which career is suited to my skills yet.

Wells, what about you for your life in the future? I could not forget all about you at work, shit! I want to talk with you about anything we can know each other more deep and also improve our communications (signs). Even touching—so on. I want you to teach me anything that you want. I like to try anything to expand my experiences. We create it ourselves and enjoy it together.

I do wish your separation is over. You are hearty person—wonderful!. You are not naive. I really love to see your being a gentleman—to make me a woman. I really want to wear nice dress for my work and meet you for eating together. We would feel fascinate.

I notice myself that you make me week and to be loved.

I feel like to touch you but I couldn't reach you because you are working on 20th floor, ha!

I love you, Pearl

Cupid had shot an arrow into my heart. Pearl was the first to say *I love you*—three months after we met, six weeks after our first date, and while we were still talking on paper!

We had connected in a magical way, but I still didn't want more than friendship from a handicapped woman, however much I loved being with Pearl and doing things with her. I could feel myself holding back. Perhaps I didn't want to take advantage of a handicap, or I was worried that my actions might be seen that way. Then it dawned on me: I didn't see Pearl as my equal. Release of my prejudice was our final hurdle.

1984: Passion

I walked across the street to Pearl's for brunch. While she toasted waffles, she asked me to check out her diving equipment. It was stored on top of cartons of World's Finest almond chocolates. The fundraising chocolates were labeled "Silent Leadership Association."

I took a box of chocolates to the kitchen. *"Whose chocolates?"*

"Silent Leadership Association. I store them because I can't trust other SLA members not to eat them. There are many deaf groups fighting. Deafies are weak to make progress. I started SLA to make strong association for leadership of all deafies who will join."

"How many members do you have?"

Pearl shrugged sadly. *"Few."* She opened a file from her desk and showed me a logo. *"My sister draw for me for SLA."*

"That is a nice logo, but if there are already many deaf associations then another one will divide deafies even more."

"No because they will join SLA for strong deaf leadership. But few in SLA want to help me sell. These chocolates are for future sale."

"They expire next month, so you can't sell them. Can I see the contract?" Pearl handed me a letter from her file. *"This is a final demand for payment threatening to hand your invoice to a collection agency. An agent will go to your house, go to your work, go to your mother. Do you want me to help?"*

Pearl nodded, and she looked relieved.

A few days later, I called the general manager of World's Finest Chocolates and asked for Pearl's debt to be canceled. The manager was understanding and courteous. "Thanks for calling," he said. "Communication with this group has always been difficult, and it became impossible after the chocolates were delivered. This group didn't know how to organize a fund-raiser. My staff should have checked whether the Silent Leadership Association was a registered society and begun with a small order, so we are as much to blame as they are. We'll be dropping a few hundred on this order, but I'll close the file."

It took Pearl and me two years to eat the chocolates.

Pearl's stillborn deaf association and her unmarketable chocolates were more examples of naïveté, but her initiative impressed me. I found myself wondering how successful Pearl would have been, and how

1984: Passion

successful she could still be, if she had a hearing mentor. Most people overrate their importance in other people's lives, and I was no exception.

Pearl came over to visit, and we jumped straight into conversation.

"Will you come back to your ex-wife before your separation be due? Would you dare leave to go back to ex-wife?"

"It's too late to save my first marriage. But after all I put into it, I sometimes wonder if a second marriage would be worthwhile."

"I think you are good man to be friends and loving but I have something alike suspecting. Do you love me? Because you try to get me away by telling me that you are not good or whatsoever."

"I have a little trouble loving now because I loved Eugénie and she left after telling me she loved me, too. I know you won't leave me if we marry unless I become an asshole. When I'm alone I want company and when I have company I want to be alone. On my motorcycle trip to Alaska, I didn't speak for two weeks. It was wonderful!"

"You know that everyone need someone to be with and communicate. I don't care what you want to be alone but I think you have one or more barriers when you need to be alone. I know about supporting people or husband. I have an idea to support you in the future. I know you would love it. I don't want to tell you now. Wait until right time I'll tell you."

"Tell me your idea now."

"I won't tell anyone until the right time I set up with the schedule. My secret!" I must tell you now about Pat, I supported him through my secret. Before his divorce he asked me about his ex-wife he loved so much. He was depressed. I said to him—'why do you think of your past, you should think of your future' plus send him to a centre that helped him 100%. He realized how wonderful I cured his pains and then he expected to have me as his girlfriend. I told him that I did not mean to make him to want me. I just want him as a friend. That's why Pat threatened me. That is why I moved from my condo."*

* Pearl's secret was *est* seminars.

1984: Passion

It was hard to believe any man would think threats could win him a lover, just as it was hard to believe any woman would think that moving across town would protect her. If Pearl had been hearing, I would have thought there was something wrong with her mind when she told me things like this, but I was always giving her the benefit of the doubt, always accommodating her handicap, always subtly prejudiced in a way that looked the opposite of what it was.

“Well, I’m happy you moved. You live next door and so you are here with me right now.”

“I will always give back my supports to people who wants to support. Sometimes they asked for something that I know, then I tell them. Many times they said WOW they think I know everything. And you were sometimes surprised of what I told you with good points.”

I was impressed to hear that so many deafies had benefited from Pearl’s wise counsel. Later, I realized that Pearl had never described any specific solution to me, except for an *est* seminar. Many of her deaf friends had taken one.

“Do you want to go to a movie this weekend? There is one at the Ridge Theatre in Spanish subtitled in English. You can read English while I listen to Spanish.”

“Yes. I don’t care if there has no subtitles. Deafies understand mostly, except if those people on movie talks too long we get bored.”

As we sat in the theater, I was surprised to see Eugénie walk past the footlights, smile at me, and sit at the other end of the theater. She and I had seen more foreign films than Hollywood films and plenty of both. The Ridge Theater had been our favorite haunt. I ignored Eugénie, and in the dark, Pearl didn’t recognize her from the photos she had seen. After the movie, Eugénie left from one exit while we left from the other. Pearl came to my place and we started writing.

“How long until I can sign?”

“Depends on how much we have a conversation. For example, we eat together, I can teach you each food. It’s easier for you to remember while we are doing. English—The red dog is under the table. ASL—Under table dog red. It’s easy. I have seen so many people

1984: Passion

who learned ASL. They become more smart than they were before.”

I stared at Pearl, baffled.

She laughed. “I was joking.”

“Hello,” I signed, using the sign in the textbook.

“That is for USA. Almost same to Canada but like this is for children.” “Hello,” she then signed the Canadian way. “For adult.”

“Sometimes deafies fingerspell words,” I wrote.

“For names and other weird words. Local names we usually name it by our signs.” “Granville Island,” she signed. “Our invention. G plus island sign.”

“When I finished school I took tests to help decide what university subject to study. Did you try the Strong Vocational Interest Test?”

“Not yet. Where can I find test like that?”

“That test only tests interests, not abilities, but it is good. I’ll show you a secret, my acceptance letter from the University of British Columbia Law School two years ago. We agreed that Eugénie would go first, and then support me to go after she started to make money, but she couldn’t get in. Then after two years supporting her to finish an MA in English she left me. Now I would have to borrow money to go and it would take me 10 years to catch up after losing 3 years’ salary. But it is nice to know I could have been a lawyer.”

Pearl pointed to the map hanging on my living room wall.

“Roads I’ve ridden on my motorcycle. All states, all provinces, half the states of Mexico. Eugénie and I rode across Canada for our honeymoon. Next, I want to ride to South America. That’s why I study Spanish. I have a pen-pal in Madrid. I ride safely, no speeding tickets.”

“I was speeding, RCMP let me go. Just warned me. I drive so fast. Mom told me that I drive exactly as my Dad’s habit. He was racecar professional. He won once I remember.” It seemed to me that unsafe driving was a likelier explanation for her father’s death than murder, but it didn’t seem that way to Pearl. “Yesterday I got so many calls. I was running and doing to finish my things for meeting and today I went to 3 friends places to clean up. So next Sunday I’ll go to my parents’ place for supper. We really love to get together to have good

1984: Passion

conversation. Relax.”

“What meeting? Why clean up for your friends?”

“At the meeting is about Silent Leadership Association, really heavy to take my duty to do. My friends always like to act to beg me to help. Sometimes I get crazy and angry for so many calls, I get out of my place to visit Jodi to be peace. I have lots of friends. You’ll know who they are. They are crazy to love me. We are very good friends to have a good conversation. I’ll introduce you to my hearies friends. They’ll tell you how great I am. Sometimes I dislike them to tell this to my mom because Mom knows this already.”

I was impressed that Pearl wanted to help others, not just fritter her life away. She often sounded conceited, but she was just being as honest as a child who has yet to understand adult manners. Even though her grammar was confusing, her gestures always made her points clear.

“I know you’re smart.”

“I don’t remember how high my IQ is. It was tested at deaf school. You’ll meet deafies children who are hearing—very smart than normal children. My good friend Elizabeth has a hearing son 8 years old. He is really smart. He learns both deaf and hearing worlds. So many deafies have hearing children. Few deafies has generations all deafies. My family is nothing. I am only one deaf. Jodi and I are 30. We talked a lot about having kids.”

“But if you wanted kids, then why did you buy a small condo?”

“For investments, I don’t like to waste \$ on rents. I don’t know how long I find Mr. Right. My friends teased me which—deaf or hearing husband I prefer to have. In my teenage I made it clear to my deaf friends that I forbid about marrying a hearing man.”

“Why did you change your mind?”

“I thought of having hearing husband cause of very few good deafie husband. But many mixed marriage failed because the hearie got bored of effort to talk to the deafie. Then the deafie married a deafie and become happy. Depends on communication and trust.”

Even though I still didn’t see Pearl as a potential mate, an equal partner in every way, I felt a twinge of disappointment to realize that as her potential mate I was also Pearl’s second choice: she wanted her

friends to be hearing (or hard-of-hearing) but her spouse to be deaf.

I Dream About You

Pearl drove me to the empty New Westminster condominium she paid the mortgage on and was struggling to sell. The ceiling on her red two-door Buick Skyhawk, one of the worst small cars ever made, was so low I could barely climb into the front seat. The radio roared with static when she turned her ignition key. I turned it down, tuned in a station, and grinned. Pearl felt the dashboard, shrugged, and drove off.

Her condominium was bare but for a mattress, a propane barbecue, and a makeup table.

“Why do you have a radio in your car?”

“It is impossible to buy a car without a radio—discrimination!”

We locked the door and walked upstairs to Elizabeth’s flat on the next floor. When we rang the doorbell, a handsome boy opened the door and signed rapidly. We walked in, and Pearl turned the light switch on and off a few times to announce our presence—it was deaf manners. A slender brunette came from the kitchen and signed; the boy interpreted.

“I’m delighted to see you, Derrick. I’m so happy Pearl has a boyfriend. This is my son Kieran,” she signed.

I was amused that Pearl had told her friend I was her boyfriend when we had yet to kiss! After a look around her spartan two-bedroom apartment, we sat down to dinner.

“Your scuba—why did you sell it?” I said, with Kieran interpreting.

“My husband left me after I bought it. It cost two thousand, but I sold it for one thousand. He sends money, but I have to work in a picture-frame factory. They say it is noisy, but I don’t care.”

“You must be a special son, with two deaf parents,” I said to Kieran, who interpreted effortlessly and professionally, without reacting to anything he was interpreting unless it was directed to him.

“I learned to sign at two and to talk at three,” Kieran signed and said.

“And to fingerspell at five,” signed Elizabeth.

“I’m listening through a perfect interpreter. Jodi interprets well, but

1984: Passion

her voice and grammar sound deaf,” I said. “Kieran speaks naturally, and he signs naturally, too.”

“I have a boy’s voice, not girl’s,” Kieran signed and said in a low voice.

“He was a devil,” Pearl signed.

Elizabeth laughed. “Kieran would turn the TV all the way up and ignore our neighbors when they pounded on the walls. When the doorbell rang, he would turn the TV down. When I answered the doorbell, the neighbors were furious, but nothing was wrong!”

“It was *fun*,” Kieran signed and said as we all laughed.

“I’m lucky we weren’t thrown out of here,” signed Elizabeth. She high-fived Kieran.

Kieran called Pearl “Auntie Pearl.” Pearl seemed to envy Elizabeth, even though her factory job must have paid half of what Pearl’s post-office job paid, because Elizabeth had a son, and she received alimony.

I was making guacamole when Pearl dropped by for another chat. I picked up the notepad and pointed to the sofa. She sat down, knees together. I could feel my heart beating.

“Often I don’t like to use voices—in public, talk to new people. There were times when I got scolded for using voices because it was not clear or the timing was wrong or I am too loud or too soft. Teachers and Mother tell me my speech is understandable. Then when I go outside people just stare at me! Shit! I get so embarrassed. It is hard to speak when you hear nothing. I read a book about the name that has influenced a person personality. ‘M’ in first name (for woman) is ‘mothering’. I have mellow feeling with you. When we are together I feel—.” Pearl pointed at her word *mellow*.

I put my arm around her, and she turned to me. We kissed as passionately as if we would never see each other again.

“Writing feels stupid after kissing! I wanted to kiss you goodnight before but I wasn’t sure,” I wrote.

“I thought last night to give ‘simple’ kiss to you in a car. It would be hard to have romance while writing.”

“You are a wonderful kisser. I can see us now: waterproof notepaper in the bathtub! I have more motivation to study ASL. You

1984: Passion

don't go around kissing too much."

"Do you mean with men? I really like a man to be real. Why most men are never real? Why most men are so 'covert?'"

Pearl had just told me she didn't trust most men, but I didn't worry for a moment that she might ever feel that way about me.

"Do you have hiking boots? Want to get exercise? Let's hike The Chief Trail. I'll come next Sunday at 9:00."

On Sunday, Pearl was waiting for me wearing expensive hiking boots. They looked brand new. We walked to the parking lot and climbed into her car. As she put the key in the ignition, a warning buzzer sounded. Astonished, Pearl sat bolt upright and stared at me.

"The sound warns you a door is open. You never heard that before?"

Pearl lifted her hair to reveal her hearing aid. She removed it and put it in her purse. She must have worn it in her car for the first time, for me. She was doing her best to build our relationship.

Most of the trail was only wide enough to walk in a single file. Pearl's gait was slower than mine, so I gestured for her to take the lead. I watched her hold the trees as she passed. She told me later that this was because she, like many deafies, found it difficult to balance because of the same defects in her inner ear that caused her deafness. We hiked without signing, absorbed in our thoughts.

As we picnicked at the summit, sparrows raided the crumbs in Pearl's hand, and soon a flock of them descended on our sandwiches. A foot from Pearl's face, I blew a referee's whistle to chase them away. Pearl stuck her finger in her ear and wiggled it to show me she heard it. I used my portable ham radio set to make a telephone call to Vancouver, and Pearl was amazed. Cellphones weren't yet available, so for me to make a telephone call from the top of a mountain seemed incredible. Pearl was impressed and seemed intimidated by the novel things I could do.

During our descent, I blew the whistle behind her, curious to find out how close I would need to be for her to hear it. I blew it several times so loudly that my ears rang, each time closing the distance by a few meters, but Pearl didn't react at all until I was just a few steps behind her. Pearl looked back, and smiled. She knew I had been testing her.

1984: Passion

Pearl came across the street with a bottle of red wine and knocked on my door. She removed her shoes, put the bottle on the kitchen table next to the notepad, and sat down at my piano. I sat down beside her. She smiled, took her hearing aid out of her purse, and put it on. It whistled while she adjusted it. She rested her hand on the piano and looked at me expectantly, wanting me to play it for her. I played *As Time Goes By*.

“Do you listen to piano music with your hearing aid?” I wrote.

Pearl shook her head. I played middle C *pianissimo* several times, then played it *piano* a few times, then *mezzoforte*. Pearl heard the loudest note and nodded. I repeated the experiment at higher and lower pitches.

“You can hear four octaves with your aid. From here to here on the keyboard. Now listen without your aid.”

Pearl took her hearing aid off. I pounded middle C so loudly I was worried my neighbors would complain. Pearl heard nothing.

“Put your aid on. Sit behind the piano where you can’t see my hands. I’ll play two notes—tell me if they are higher or lower.”

She put her hearing aid back on. I played pairs of notes between several octaves. Pearl “heard” the order correctly half the time, so she was guessing—she didn’t know what higher and lower *meant*. With a powerful hearing aid, her right ear could hear a pure tone as a buzzing noise like static but which contained no tonal information.

“The notes must sound like Morse code to you. Only on or off.”

Pearl removed her hearing aid. *“Peace.”* She pointed to the lyrics: *A kiss is just a kiss*, and she kissed me.

“You make wonderful kisses. Who taught you?” She pointed at me. *“But you had a husband and boyfriends.”*

“None good kissers. Some never kiss when we have sex. It’s true.”

I put a Moody Blues record on the turntable, and we sat on the sofa. *“Never Comes the Day”* from *On the Threshold of a Dream* filled my ears.

I feel her gently sighing as the evening slips away.
If only you knew what’s inside of me now,
You wouldn’t want to know me somehow.

Pearl walked to my record shelf and studied the covers. She was curious about them, and I am curious about curious people.

1984: Passion

“You put the names together but Beethoven is after Mozart. Beethoven was the most famous deafie.”

“Yes, but if he was born deaf he wouldn’t be famous. I put them in birth order because each composer learned from those who lived before.”

She took *Die Kunst der Fuge* from the beginning of the shelf. “So music begins at Bach.” She took *Eine Alpensinfonie* from the other end of the shelf. Its cover was of the Matterhorn with the sun rising behind it. “What does this music sound like?”

“It is beautiful music that tells a story of hikers on a mountain. It’s last because Strauss died just before we were born.”

“What about this one?” Pearl pointed at the cover of Vivaldi’s *L’Amoroso Concerto*.

I put my arm around her, kissed her, and pointed at the cover, which had two lovers caressing in the grass. Pearl nodded. Pearl always wore high-neckline clothes. Today, her denim shirt had six buttons with only one opened. I opened one more and kissed her neck. She nodded in her silent world as the Moody Blues urged me on.

But you will love me tonight,
We alone will be alright,
In the end.

I pulled back, but Pearl smiled as though she were melting.

Give just a little bit more,
Take a little bit less,
From each other tonight.

Pearl’s skin became flushed as I followed her onto the carpet.

Admit what you’re feeling
And see what’s in front of you,
It’s never out of your sight.

Pearl’s period was imminent; otherwise, we might have become parents that night. Neither of us pursued casual sex, so she wasn’t on the Pill and I had never worn a condom. Pearl soon saw her doctor and started on the Pill. Now every weekend became a sleepover.

Pearl was self-conscious about her one undeveloped breast, a defect easily masked by clothing. Like deafness, this defect came from her

1984: Passion

mother's measles, she said, reminding me that her children would be normal. Eugénie wasn't pretty, but she was an energetic lover. Pearl was the opposite, but Eugénie had never been raped and had had no previous lovers. We had worked our way through every non-bondage position in *The Joy of Sex*. Now, ten years later, I was working my way through every sign in *The Joy of Signing*!

When I returned from my live-aboard sailing course, I was surprised and delighted to find a stack of letters from Pearl in my mailbox.

21 May 1984

Hi Derrick

How do you feel today?

I feel good after my eating Japanese meal at food court today.

I wish you came to eat with me and have a chat! Oh, Boy! my back of legs are stiff (not really bad) I am going to health club with Jodi at 6:00 and then eat salad with her at Salvador Deli.

I wish to see you everyday—I bet you'll be busy tonight after your class. Next time when I have time to make a magnificent note for you—fun!

I love you, Pearl

22 May 1984

Tuesday Morning.

Yesterday, I knew I would feel funny and low a little bit by being without you. I miss you!

The men came to move all my other furnitures from Fanny's to my condo and so many boxes for 5 hours. One of the men is alike 'hippie'—with very long hair (ponytail!). He worked so hard. I thought he might be slow worker but he was not. Anyway I did not have more boxes left for few more things.

After that Jodi and I went to eat salad and one glass of apple cider each. We went to Ridge theatre. It was good show. I want to tell you about it.

23 May 1984

Wednesday Afternoon.

I just got home from work and felt unhappy about my work. One lady Vera complained about the boss named Lance who spoiled me by keeping me in Jack's office and also in directory

1984: Passion

before. Vera told employees that it was not fair to her because she knew Lance like me cause I am always quiet and peace. Now. Lance said to me I have to work on Sunday twice a month to be fair to others. I'll work—day off on Friday, Sat, Sun then Sat then Friday, Sat, Sun, repeatly.

I really want from Friday to Sunday off so I can get weekends off (always). Lance gave me weekends off all the times before I told him that is still not fair because they talk too much. We laughed.

I feel bad because I can't go hiking with you every weekends. But we can go twice (weekends) a month. How do you feel about that? *Shit!*

I must go now to health club with Jodi. When I go sleep tonight, I will dream about you and forget about "work."

I love you. Smack!

24 May 1984

Thursday Afternoon.

Hi Derrick,

I feel good today because I am looking forward to see you tomorrow. The weather is not bad. Just little sunny. I did read and answer the question of English book that I brought from Library. I had a short time to read and answered the questions. Made it but I really want to sit down with plenty of time to do it so that I can fix or correct my English.

Oh, Boy I envy you good time on sailing. I can imagine how I feel when I ride on the sailing—beautiful. With you, Ha!

I hate Jodi's interrupting my writing this, *Shit!*—I have to cook Chili for our supper. Then we are going to pack some dishes tonight. I did not have enough empty boxes last time.

I love you, Pearl

An hour after I returned, Pearl walked over—I hadn't yet called her. We hugged and kissed. I gave her a souvenir and thanked her for her letters. She invited me to her mother's home for their family reunion dinner. At last, I would meet Pearl's family.

A few days later, we drove to her mother's apartment. Pearl pushed the intercom button in the lobby. I nodded to Pearl when I heard *hello* from the speaker.

"*Harroo,*" muttered Pearl into the intercom.

1984: Passion

“Come in, Pearl,” boomed the voice through the intercom. Her mother had expected Pearl to feel her voice with her fingers on the speaker just as she would have to do when visiting any hearing person. The entrance door clicked open, and we walked to the second floor.

Pearl opened her mother’s unlocked door, and we walked into the aroma of home cooking. Pearl’s mother greeted us in an apron. She was friendly but reserved and looked every one of her 51 years. She introduced me to Art, who was her third husband, to Pearl’s siblings Kevin, Carol, and Debbie, and to Debbie’s husband; all were visiting from Alberta. Pearl’s mother made me feel comfortable, yet I sensed a vague sadness, a feeling I had never felt before. There was warmth, togetherness, and love in Pearl’s family, but there was no cheer, as if something was wrong which could not be discussed. Among Pearl’s mother’s four children, only Debbie had married and had had a child.

There was no signing, so an outsider looking in from a distance would never have suspected that one of us was deaf. Pearl’s mother and Art had been married for three years, and it seemed as though they were still trying to fit furniture from two apartments into one. Art led me through a maze of furniture to a sofa by the window. He described angrily how he had been laid off as a provincial park gatekeeper. He now spent his time working part-time as the caretaker of their apartment building, woodworking, organizing Elks affairs with Pearl’s mother, making liqueur by marinating fruit in vodka, and grumbling about the government’s privatization policy. Pearl’s mother worked in catering and seemed to have an endless supply of one-gallon mayonnaise jars.

I sat next to Pearl, who sat opposite her mother. Her mother served roast beef with vegetables and horseradish, and butter flowed down the mashed potatoes in rivers. This down-to-earth family was a pleasant change from the artistic pretentiousness of my previous actress in-laws.

“Delicious,” signed Pearl. “*Good cook,*” she wrote.

“Put that notepad away, Pearl,” said her mother. “Are you wearing your hearing aid?”

“Noo ...,” said Pearl almost inaudibly, most of the sound coming out her nose. “*Lefa hoe.*”

“She left it at home,” her mother said.

1984: Passion

“In the three months since we met, I never heard Pearl speak a sentence before tonight, only a word here and there.”

“What?” gestured Pearl.

“Derrick never heard you talk before.”

“*Eee ill sigh soo ...*,” Pearl mumbled.

“He will sign soon. Pearl needn’t be ashamed of her accent.”

“I signed up for an ASL course at Langara College.”

“Pearl will like that,” said Carol, “and I’m sure it will be an adventure for both of you.”

“I once bought a book of signs,” said Debbie. “But we live in Alberta, and we can’t use sign language on the phone.”

“What?” gestured Pearl.

“Derrick will take a course,” said her mother.

“Do you know any signs?”

“None.”

“Why don’t you learn a few? It’s never too late.”

“We do just fine orally. Don’t we, Pearl?”

“What?” gestured Pearl.

“She is misbehaving because we have a visitor. Naughty girl.”

“Pearl told me she loves you, but she hardly knows you because you won’t sign.” All eyes turned to their mother.

“I have followed the experts’ advice, and everything I have done is to support Pearl to become as oral as possible so she can function in the real world. The greater her oral skills, the greater her opportunities, so the better her life will be. We want the best for Pearl. Please help us, too.”

“Even if you learn to sign, you must help her with lipreading and speech,” said Kevin.

“One way doesn’t rule out the other, does it?”

“It does,” said her mother. “*That’s* the problem.”

“It seems to me that at thirty, you might as well communicate any way you can. I suppose she’s not with you enough now for your oral practice to make much of a difference anymore.”

“Hearing signers don’t help. Why do you want to sign? Do you want to keep Pearl for yourself? Talk to her, and listen to her talk, too. Help her with the hearing world. We support deaf children through the Elks’

oral development fund.”

“Is that why you joined the Elks?”

“Yes, and I’m sure glad I did. I met Art there.”

Pearl swung her index fingers back past her ears.

“Don’t pretend you don’t understand me,” said Pearl’s mother in a patronizing way, which must have annoyed Pearl.

“You *do* know some signs,” I said.

I could see that Pearl was from a stable and loving family. I couldn’t see how she could think that her mother had killed her father.

Pearl visited me bringing lox, cream cheese, and bagels. We kissed. I invited her to ride on my motorcycle to Mount Baker for a roadhouse lunch and then to my parents’ for dinner. Pearl was happy to have a chance to meet my parents. My relationship with my parents had none of the tension of Pearl’s relationship with her mother.

I called my parents and arranged it. Pearl seemed to try to read my lips while I was on the telephone with them. I took two leather riding suits from the hall closet. Pearl tried Eugénie’s leathers on; they fit perfectly. With our gear on, we walked downstairs to the parking lot.

My polished, black BMW was parked in front of my unwashed Volkswagen Beetle. Both were ten years old. A sticker on the car’s window said, *Have You Hugged Your Motorcycle Today?* A ham radio antenna stood in the center of the roof, like a taxi antenna. I pushed the motorcycle away from the car, exposing the car’s license plate: *Eugénie*.

Pearl pointed at the license plate and winced. I smiled and shrugged. I adjusted Pearl’s helmet and started the engine. She climbed on. I put her hands around my waist and pressed them tight. I took a deep breath, smiled, and put all thoughts unrelated to riding out of my mind. We rode off.

When we arrived, my mother heard the throbbing of the engine and rushed out to greet us. Pearl climbed off the bike and took off her helmet. Unable to speak to each other, my mother and Pearl simply hugged. My father greeted Pearl with a handshake.

Pearl followed my mother into the kitchen and helped cook dinner. Father mixed a gin-and-tonic for himself while I took a Labatt’s beer

1984: Passion

from the refrigerator. He and I sat in the living room.

“Son, your girl is pretty, but be careful not to let your second relationship be the consequence of your first. Six months is nothing; give yourself time. I spent years working with handicapped people in charitable foundations—enjoyable work that doesn’t pay well, like most enjoyable work. From my experience, I warn you that the problem is not a handicap you can see; the problem is the *effect* on the person that the handicap *causes*. It’s difficult to go through childhood with a handicap and develop a balanced view of the world, even if deafness or blindness or another defect is the only defect, which it often is not. You just can’t grow up completely free of psychological scars.”

“Like ...?” I said.

“Bitterness. Suspicion. Deafness is information loss; blindness, less so. Some deaf people and blind people can’t *trust* because they can’t know all that goes on around them, so suspicion fills their mental void.”

“Pearl seems happier than Eugénie. She isn’t driven to live up to her mother’s and sister’s talents. Deafness is a language deficiency. She can do anything, other than talk.”

“No, it’s more than that. I’ve seen some of the handicapped believe that the world owes them a living, that taxes should pay for interpreters, for example, so why learn English well? Be careful that you don’t come to be an entitlement. Do you see what I’m getting at?”

“No.”

“I’m worried you’ll be used as a steppingstone again. There used to be a saying that a man owed his career to his first wife and his second wife to his career, but your generation is reversing the genders. Mating isn’t about being an equal opportunity spouse. Do you want to spend the rest of your life being an interpreter?”

Pearl came into the dining room jingling tableware, my mother followed her with heated plates, and the women set the table. Father and I were not expected to help.

“Pearl made the gravy. She’s terrific in the kitchen,” said my mother.

When we sat down to eat, I handed the notepad to my mother. She wrote in beautiful cursive script, speaking each word as she wrote it. It was a happy evening. It was clear that were Pearl and I to become a

couple, she would be warmly welcomed by my parents, despite my father's concerns about the risk of psychological scars.

As we mounted the motorcycle to ride home, my mother hugged Pearl affectionately.

I said, "Isn't she beautiful, Mom?"

Jun:

A Silent Movie

My ASL classes started. I had been looking forward to them for weeks.

"I'm glad you're here this evening," the instructor signed and said. "Each of you please say your name and why you want to learn ASL."

"I have a deaf son."

"I work with disabled people."

"I have a deaf nephew."

"I am a missionary."

"I'm a woodworking teacher. I would like to teach deaf students."

"All good reasons. I don't want to hear about curiosity, or giving back to society. 'My country, my language,' they say. Well, there are two million deafies in North America, and they can't learn to hear and join your country, but you can learn to sign and join *their* country. This is what makes the deaf seem militant at times."

"I *noticed*," said another student sarcastically.

"They do their best to live in our deaf-impaired country, but we are not as generous to them. A global world exists with deafies communicating and intermarrying with each other. We are outsiders. My parents are deaf, and I'm still an outsider." The instructor looked for a reaction and then continued to sign and speak. "Native ASL is not a signed version of English. It branched off from French Sign Language when sign language was established in the US by a French deaf man in the nineteenth century. Syntax and basic signs like 'man' and 'woman' haven't changed since then—they're French. It's almost as hard for an American deafie to sign to a British deafie as it is for an American hearie to speak to a French hearie. Even the fingerspelling is different! BSL needs two hands to fingerspell, ASL just one. How many of you know a

few signs now?”

Most of us raised our hands.

“In addition to dactylogy I’m going to teach you about manners,” he signed and said. “By the way, dactylogy is not to be confused with dactylography, which means fingerprinting.”

We laughed. I could see our classes were going to be fun.

“If you aren’t sure a deafie is looking at you, then wave, touch an elbow, or stomp before you sign. And don’t let your eyes wander—it breaks the communication channel, so it’s rude. You must manage that channel to keep it open.”

“How many signs are there?” said another student.

“Five thousand. Try to learn several new signs every day.”

“English has over a hundred thousand words.”

“Yes, but when you need an unusual word, you fingerspell it. I’ll sign some word pairs quickly, the equivalent of homonyms. See if you can spot the difference.” He signed several word pairs. “See the difference?”

Embarrassed, the students looked at each other. “Hardly,” said one.

“I signed, *shy-whore*, *blue-bastard*, *ugly-summer*, *wrong-yellow*, *student-garbage*, *chocolate-church*. ASL has charm and quirks every bit as rich as English.”

“I’m done for,” muttered a student.

“This beginner course focuses on signing using simple English syntax. I’ll mention the difference with native ASL from time to time as we go along. When you sign ASL using English syntax, all deafies will understand you, and they will be delighted to answer you the same way. But when they sign to each other, they will use native ASL, and you won’t understand the details of the conversation, especially when they are going at it as fast as they can.”

“How long does it take to reach full fluency?” I asked.

“That depends what you mean by full fluency. Few hearing signers make it past signed English ASL to native ASL unless they are born to deaf parents, live or work among many deaf people so they see them signing to each other all the time, or they study it full time for a degree. The rest, with just one deaf person in the family, end up in the middle, often with a patois of ‘home signs’ unique to the family.”

1984: Passion

“Why doesn’t native ASL converge with English ASL? Everyone would be better off,” said a student.

“Because the native syntax is more efficient. Some well-educated deafies prefer English ASL because it helps them with written English, but most deafies find it snobbish. For example, ‘Have you been to Toronto?’ is signed in native ASL, ‘Already touch Toronto?’—two fewer signs. Deafies with little English education would write it that way too—in ‘deaf-speak.’

“Best of all, native ASL takes full advantage of *dimensionality*. Spoken languages can’t do this. ASL can have multiple, simultaneous threads. This makes it rich and beautiful. English has to use word order to indicate direction, and a pronoun like ‘he’ can only refer to one person at a time. But in ASL we just point to a spot and sign a name to establish a ‘he’ there. Then we point to another spot and sign another name to establish another ‘he’ over there, and so on. We can have half a dozen ‘he’ pronouns in use at the same time. Then we toss verbs between those spots to indicate action. English can’t do this without confusion.”

“Are subject and object always shown by the sign direction?” I asked.

“Yes. To make it a question instead of a statement, just add a quizzical look—a facial question mark. To add common adverbs, you add *feeling* to your signing, like fast, anger, uncertainty. One sign sequence can translate to dozens of sentences! Signed songs are beautiful, like a dance with words. ASL has puns, too. Does anyone know this sign?” The instructor made a fist and relaxed it several times.

“Milk,” said a student.

“And this?” He made the same sign but moved it past his face.

The class was baffled.

“Past-your-eyes milk—pasteurized milk! Now, the reality check. Although ASL richly describes anything that’s the least bit visual, it describes abstract and complex concepts rather poorly. There’s almost no idiom in ASL while most English usage is idiomatic. Idioms are crucial to abstract thought. Think of it like this: ASL is a *silent movie*. English is an *unillustrated book*.”

I loved these classes. After my first ASL lesson, Pearl did her part by refusing to use the notepad; she forced me to sign and to fingerspell. We

1984: Passion

met in the food court several times a week and were together on weekends. I studied *The Joy of Signing* at home and on the bus. When I was alone, I signed to myself in the mirror. At first, our communication was 80:20 fingerspelling to signs, but, one by one, the fingerspelled common words were replaced by their signs. Within a few months, our communication was 20:80 fingerspelling to signs, and, gradually, only infrequently-used words had to be fingerspelled. Our syntax was English, as it is for most hearing signers, because that is the way Pearl always signed it to me.*

Pearl invited me to visit a deaf couple for more signing practice. We went in my Beetle—its *Eugénie* license plates didn't bother her at all. I turned on the 8-track player and played "Truckin'" by the Grateful Dead, one of my few 8-track cartridges that hadn't jammed.

"I notice you never drive up to the white line," signed Pearl as we waited at a traffic light. "You always stop a little bit behind."

"It's a habit I learned from Leo—we can watch the people in their cars better than they can watch us."

We parked in front of a low-rise apartment building. A sticker on an old car read *I'm Not Deaf—I'm Ignoring You*. A terrier forced its nose between the curtains on the ground floor and barked at us.

"Dwight is a funny man. You will like him. His wife is Dana."

Pearl pushed the lobby intercom button, and the entrance clicked open. A young man greeted us in the corridor. After introductions in sign language, we went inside, where Dwight introduced Dana.

"Only signs and fingerspelling. Derrick is my student," signed Pearl in signed English, not native ASL, so I could understand her.

"Good. Our dog is deaf, too."

I raised my eyebrows. "How did you find a deaf dog?" I signed.

"Terriers are often deaf. SPCA phoned WID to say they had another one. WID called me, and I adopted him."

* Pearl's grammar and syntax errors disappear in this book as we replaced writing with sign language because the interpreter interprets signs in the way that English is spoken.

“What is WID?”

“Western Institute for the Deaf,” fingerspelled Pearl. “The dog is lucky to avoid death at the SPCA.”

“Sit,” Dwight signed. The dog sat.

“Dead,” he signed. The dog rolled over on its back.

“Watch,” he signed. The dog jumped onto the back of the sofa, nudged the drapes aside with his nose, and looked out the window for visitors.

“I’m impressed,” I signed.

“Animals learn signs easier than speech,” signed Pearl. “Animals prefer deafies. We are more sensitive and communicate to their eyes. A woman taught gorillas ASL. It’s true.”

“Children of deaf parents learn to sign before children of hearing parents learn to talk,” signed Dwight. “How did you meet Pearl?”

“In the Pacific Centre food court. We ate at the same time.”

Pearl laughed. “My lunch was one o’clock and only for 30 minutes. One day I had a doctor’s appointment at 11 o’clock, so I ate there at noon, and then I met Derrick. So then I got approval to change my lunchtime to noon and for one hour. The change was difficult because of union rules, but I won. Lucky!”

“I didn’t know you hunted me,” I signed. I heard the dog growl and saw the dog’s tail wagging between the curtains.

Dwight tapped the floor. “I give you some man-to-man advice. Work hard. It is the responsibility of the hearie in a deafie-hearie relationship to understand Deaf culture. The opposite is impossible.”

“How?”

“Through sign language. When you sign well, you can join us.”

Gradually, as the deafies segued from signed English to fast native ASL, I became as excluded as Pearl whenever she was with hearies.

After our visit, I drove Pearl home and parked in front of her apartment. I turned on the car’s dome light so we could sign.

“That was interesting. Deaf culture. Thank you.”

“Good signing practice for you.”

“I think I understand how you felt growing up in an oral family.”

“Missing everything.”

1984: Passion

“Why don’t you teach me native ASL, not signed English? I understand when you sign to me but not when you sign to deafies.”

“First, you need more signs. There is still too much fingerspelling. You sign to me in English, so I will improve my English. Then I will teach you native ASL.”

“When?”

“That depends on you.”

It depended more on Pearl than on me. As it would turn out, by the time we signed effortlessly to each other in signed English, I realized that Pearl had no interest in taking me to the final level: native ASL. I would never be able to follow more than a fraction of what she and her friends said when they were together, and so I never got to know any of them closely. Because Pearl was my window into the deaf community, nearly all of what the community knew about me came from Pearl, whether it was right or wrong.

Pearl retrieved her spare TTY from Jodi and lent it to me. I took the device home, placed my telephone handset on it, dialed Pearl’s number, and heard the familiar beeping tones. In 1984, this was the only digital device in my home other than a pocket calculator, and it seemed amazing at the time. Fluorescent green letters scrolled across the display.

```
PEARL HERE GA
HELLO JERRICK HERE TOO
DONT FORGET TYPE GA AT THE END GA
I HAD A NICE EVENING AMAZING JOB GA
I WANT A JOB SOMEDAY BUT NOT DEAF I PREFER THAT JOB
HEARS TO HELP ME GA
GOOD IDEA I WANT A JOB TOO CAN I ASK YOU A FAVOR? GA
YOU CAN ASK GA
I HAVE TO GO TO MY BOSS HOUSE FOR A COMPANY DINNER
TOMORROW CAN I BORROW YOUR BUICK TOMORROW NIGHT? IF I
DRIVE MY RUSTY VW I WILL HAVE TO HIDE IT GA
OK JODI WILL COME TOMORROW SO NO NEED FOR MY CAR GA
THANK YOU I WILL COME TO YOUR HOUSE TOMORROW AFTER
WORK AND GET THE KEY THANK YOU GA
OK WHEN YOU BRING IT BACK PUT KEY IN MY MAILBOX I WANT
```

1984: Passion

TO BORROW YOUR MOTORCYCLE ON THE WEEKEND GA
OK IF YOU HAVE MOTORCYCLE LICENSE GA
NO HA HA YOU NEED TO DRIVE ME GA
HA HA OK IF NOT RAINING SEE YOU TOMORROW BYE GA
WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED TYPE SK NOT GA SK
OK SK
KISS SMACK SK SK SK

As soon as I returned from dinner with my colleagues the next night, my telephone rang. I heard tones and put the handset on the TTY.

HELLO GA
PEARL HERE IS THAT DERRICK? GA
HA THANK YOU FOR LENDING ME YOUR CAR TONIGHT GA
I DONT FORGIVE YOU FOR WHAT YOU DID YOU KNOW WHAT YOU
DID GA
I BORROWED YOUR CAR NOT OK NOW? GA
THATS NOT WHAT I MEAN YOU THINK GA
I AM THINKING AND I DONT UNDERSTAND AT FOOD COURT
TOMORROW PLEASE EXPLAIN GA
NO POINT TO EXPLAIN TO YOU BUT SEE YOU AT 1215
SK

I waited for Pearl at the food court the next day. My environment and hers were so different; the food court cacophony annoyed me, yet, for her, it would have been as peaceful as sitting beside a lake. Pearl had never been late before. When she arrived, she stared at me icily.

“You must accept responsibility for your action.”

“I borrowed your car because a new, wealthy colleague from Singapore had invited all our managers to his home in the British Properties. I didn’t want to drive my rusty Beetle there with *Eugénie* on the license plate and park it next to his new Mercedes-Benz. I drove to his house. I ate dinner. I refilled your fuel tank. I parked your car, put the key in your mailbox, and walked home.”

“It is finished.” Pearl held her finger to her lip.

I was baffled. How could she go from loving me to accusing me of treachery, and from one day to the next? My mind told me to say

1984: Passion

goodbye, but my heart would not let me do it. Instead, I convinced myself that I was insensitive and I had explained myself inadequately, and so this incident was my fault.

“Can we stay friends?”

“If you still want to be friends,” she signed without smiling.

“I do.” I smiled. “The weather will be sunny this weekend. Do you want to go to Wreck Beach on Saturday?”

“I never went there. Is it safe?”

“Yes. Friendly and quiet, the best beach in Vancouver.”

“Can Jodi come with us?”

“Sure.”

“Then I accept your invitation.”

Pearl never mentioned the episode again, and she never told me what she thought I had done with her car. She had said that she couldn't trust me and she was breaking up with me, but then she seemed to forget about it. I let it pass, trusting that Pearl would come to know me better.

Pearl, Jodi, and I parked near the beach and hiked down the steep trail. I held both women's hands to help them balance. We spread towels on the sand beside a driftwood log and undressed. A thousand people were nude except for an Asian man sitting on the breakwater and a bodybuilder strutting about wearing only a chrome cock ring and a T-shirt that said MY NAME IS DAVE MY NUMBER IS 367-0187. A man with leathery skin carried a cooler chanting, “*Tequila sunrise! Margarita!*” A woman on a rock practiced tai chi. In the days before hand-held videotape recorders, digital cameras, and cellphones, nude beaches were like a private club.

“It's like a party,” signed Pearl, with Jodi interpreting effortlessly.

“No clothes means no showing off. Most people look better when clothed.”

“I like the coconut smell,” Jodi signed and said.

“Spread lotion on your bottoms or you won't be able to sit down tomorrow. I can spread some on your back if you like.”

“Fine,” signed Pearl. “I see pink bikinis over there already. Ouch!”

Pearl and Jodi lay prone on towels. I spread lotion on Pearl's back,

1984: Passion

arms, neck, and legs. Pearl pointed at her bottom, so I spread lotion on her buttocks too. She rolled onto her back, put lotion on her own breasts, and gestured for me to spread lotion everywhere else. She sat up.

“Your turn,” she signed.

I lay prone on the towel. She spread lotion on my back, arms, neck, and legs. She tapped my shoulder. I turned over onto my back.

“I’m shy,” she signed.

“Good for you.”

Pearl spread lotion on my chest, arms, and legs.

I sat up. “Did you study how to do that?”

Pearl grinned. “Not yet. I will put ‘learn massage’ on my list.”

I completed my untouched areas while Jodi spread lotion on herself.

“No boyfriend today,” Jodi signed and said. “Gavin is working.”

“On Saturday?” I said.

“He sells investments.”

“A stockbroker. How long has he been your boyfriend?”

“Two years.”

“Does he sign?”

“No. I was worried he would leave me to find another girl so he doesn’t have to repeat so much talking, but now I know he loves me.”

“You live in the hearing world although you sign perfectly.”

“But sometimes I feel like I don’t fit in the hearing world.”

“Why?”

“Because hearing people think listening is more important than seeing. Eyes and ears are both important.”

“Make small signs,” signed Pearl. “Deafies can read your ASL from *far* away, then gossip about our talk. Don’t discuss private things here.”

“OK. Then stop signing and start swimming,” I said.

Jodi removed her hearing aids and put them in her backpack. We swam in the surf with the crowd. Everyone was nude.

“Derrick!”

I turned to see Eugénie, nude, waving at us. It had been less than a year since she left me, but now I felt nothing for her. We waded to the shore. I introduced the women to each other, speaking and signing. Jodi was deaf without her hearing aids so I did my best to interpret.

1984: Passion

“A different way to meet,” Pearl signed.

It *was* an eccentric way for my wife and girlfriend to meet, and it indicated how open-minded we all were. There was no jealousy; I’m sure Eugénie wanted me to find a new lover, too, to assuage her guilt.

“I saw your car. It’s easy to spot a car with my name on it!” said Eugénie.

“Our towels are over there. Do you want lotion?”

“No need to butter me up,” Eugénie chuckled. “I’ve got my own.”

Eugénie opened her backpack, pulled out a clipboard, and sat down cross-legged next to Pearl. Her clipboard and pen shuttled between Pearl and Eugénie while Jodi and I reapplied suntan lotion and signed.

It occurred to me that even though Pearl didn’t wear a bikini because it would reveal her scar, with me she had presented her whole body to the world. I tried to look over Eugénie’s shoulder at the clipboard, but Pearl sensed it and stared at me, so I turned away.

Jodi and I walked to the suntanned hawkler and bought four margaritas. Jodi put her hearing aids back on and began interpreting.

Eugénie put the clipboard away. “Try buying margaritas on any other public beach! I love Wreck Beach.”

I laughed. “Me, too. No police, and no plainclothesmen, either!”

“Did you bring your Minox?”

“Yes.”

“Would you like me to take a photo of the three of you together?”

“Of course!”

Eugénie took our photo sitting nude in front of a driftwood log. I offered to share our sandwiches, but Eugénie stood up and said, “I must go. I enjoyed my conversation with Pearl. I found the process challenging. I’m impressed by your signing, Derrick. It’s improved since the Ridge Theatre.” She put on her clothes and wandered away.

“Did you have a good conversation?” I signed to Pearl.

“Yes. Eugénie told me you met her at a university dance. She asked you to dance with her, and you said no.”

“She was 18 and plain; that’s why she was asking men to dance. Acne, ugly dress, short, thick glasses. Bifocals! I wasn’t interested.”

“I notice she wears contact lenses now—she blinks too much. She

1984: Passion

said you came back and danced with her after some time.”

“Yes, after I smoked a joint. Drugs are dangerous.” We laughed. “I didn’t ask for her phone number, so she asked for mine. A few days later she called and invited me to visit her. She was after me.”

“You got together and you stayed together.”

“For nine years. We were good for each other.”

“I don’t understand why she left you to live alone. She wrote that she wants her independence, but there must be other reasons, too.”

“Eugénie didn’t need me anymore. She walked out of my life as easily as she walked into it. Modern, feminist, independent, a mistress. Her grandmother, mother, and sister are actresses, but Eugénie is not talented in the same way. So she felt her mother looked down at her—and at me. I watched her mother and sister beat her at charades.”

“What’s charades?” signed Pearl. I explained the game, and Pearl laughed. “It’s a stupid idea. Deafies will always win charades. I am not like Eugénie. I don’t care what anyone thinks of me. I am *me*. Did she offer to take our photo together?”

I nodded.

“I knew it! She was testing us to see if we would hold hands.”

Pearl saw covert behavior everywhere, a quirk of being deaf, I assumed.

Jodi laughed. “I hope you pass all of Pearl’s tests. Deafie-hearie works if the hearie has patience to be interpreter, secretary, and everything. Hearie-hearie couples share 50:50, but deafie-hearie share 80:20.”

I lay back on the towel and looked up at the silhouette of the two women against the sky. Pearl, despite her quirks, made me happy. I could imagine spending my life with Pearl.

Snowslide

I turned the motorcycle onto the freeway, savoring the three-dimensional motion which riding and flying provide. As the morning sun peered under the clouds, I crossed the Blaine border. An hour later, I turned east onto the Cascades Highway. After a while I turned off onto

the perpetually dark, damp, and sometimes flooded Index-Galena road. I counted the miles until I saw the trail which led to the river. I parked in a clearing next to a black Ford F250 pickup truck with tinted windows. The pickup, motorcycle, and I could not be seen from the road. The rushing sound of the Skykomish River filled the forest air.

The pickup was dwarfed by the timber platform and steel cable-tower beside it. The tower was an inverted V two stories high. A wire rope stretched from across the river over the tower and into the earth to a buried anchor. I blew the motorcycle horn three times and listened to its echo. I climbed the ladder to the platform and waited, enjoying the view of a wedge of late snow that glimmered like icing sugar below the mist shrouding the peaks on the north side of Snowslide Gulch.

The cable faded into the trees on the other side of the river two hundred meters away. In autumn, the river could be crossed on foot or by four-wheel drive, but in spring the flood from the mountain snowmelt sometimes washed cabins away. For most of the year, the north bank, on the other side of the river where my friend lived far from public utilities, was supremely isolated. I loved it there.

After ten minutes, I saw the cable move. I reached up, put my hand on it, and felt a subsonic throb. Suddenly, from the other side of the river, a cablecar burst through the trees and accelerated toward me.

The cablecar was a plywood platform suspended by a steel frame from two rubber-covered pulleys. It rolled under the wire like a flying surfboard as its operator's legs cranked bicycle pedals linked to a pulley through a chain. The cable moaned mournfully as the cablecar approached. The bearded, balding rider hovered over the landing at the end of the cable and looped a chain through a pulley to prevent it from rolling. He floated in the air, eye-to-eye with me.

"I was wondering what time you'd show up," the man said.

"I was wondering if you'd heard me honk, Virgil," I replied.

"You can buy your own block and harness and belay yourself over the river when I'm not home. Did you bring your gadget?"

I nodded, hung my pack on a hook under the cablecar, and climbed aboard. Virgil released the brake and I held my feet away from the spinning pedals as the cablecar rushed down the catenary curve of the

1984: Passion

cable to the center of the river. As we rolled to a stop, Virgil grabbed the cable with his gloved hand, and we floated over the river, swaying five stories above the water.

“That sound—I love it! And *what* a view,” I said.

“Especially under a full moon after a snowfall.” A pair of red rubber rafts careened around the bend and splashed down the river. Wet-suited, helmeted rafters paddled furiously. They were astonished to see us dangling over their heads. “Ten years ago, there was nothing here except logging. Copper mining played out a century ago. White water used to keep strangers away, but now it *attracts* them. Damn. Let’s go!”

I put my feet on the pedals and grunted as we pushed off, and I hauled our weight up the slope of the cable to a giant turnbuckle anchored to an oak tree. A husky stood next to the tree, his ears pricked.

“I envy your lifestyle,” I said. “I hate apartment life.”

“Opt out. You got the brains. You just need the *chutzpah* and a dog.”

“I need money. You need to be rich to avoid the madding crowd.”

I jumped down and followed Virgil past a row of firewood. “I’ve cut enough for two years. Jim rented a ‘dozer, and we cut logs and did lines of coke all week. I’ve got 30 more logs behind the ridge.”

As we walked farther, Virgil’s two-story house crowned by a cupola came into view. “You should have been an architect.”

Virgil laughed. “I’d go broke designing places no one could afford.”

I followed him past the house and up a steep hill to his private reservoir. He lifted a pipe from the barrel of rocks which served as a filter, and I drank from the clear stream gushing out. I followed Virgil down the trail covering the penstock. The whine of the turbine and the hum of the generator at the bottom seemed out of place in the forest.

“Check the sparking, you being so knowledgeable about molecules. My batteries are down to 45 volts. That’s bad for my inverter.”

I cupped my hands over the commutator window and peered inside. “That sparking looks OK to me. Get the generator specifications, and check the spring pressure with a scale.”

Virgil nodded. I followed him past the battery room to his house. Rhea, his wife, hugged me. He turned the Jimmy Buffet music on the stereo up so loud that the floor vibrated. We sat down at the black

marble dining table for lunch. Hummingbirds hovered over the feeder outside the bay window. Rhea took a snort of cocaine and passed me the vial.

“I tell you, Derrick—as one of the Chosen Few who I allow here—that each year I get a little more concerned about how long we can hold out on our fairy-tale land before aging takes its toll. On the other hand, we might be stuck here forever, and you and I may not get to live in Cuba, scuba diving and watching the palm trees sway.”

“You mentioned a deaf girlfriend in your letter,” said Rhea.

“Yes, a deaf country girl. You’d love her. I’d like to bring her here.”

“Derrick, I’ve got to tell you about a guy I know. He worked at a college for the deaf on the East Coast before he saw God. Then he quit and came out here to His country to live,” said Virgil.

“Was that Gallaudet College? * He’s an expert! I’d like to meet him.”

“Yes, he was an interpreter. I don’t want him here. I don’t want any Born-Agains here. I tell you, people who’ve seen God can turn in their mother. I ran into him in the store, and we talked about you. He said to tell you this: deaf women can never love hearing men, and there is only one reason deaf women take hearing men—to support kids, preferably deaf kids. He said a deaf man with a good job would be Pearl’s first choice, but few deaf men have good jobs. So you are her second choice.”

I was astonished to hear this coming from a former employee of Gallaudet, especially when he knew nothing of Pearl except she was deaf.

“It’s true that she had a deaf husband and a deaf partner before me, but *most* people prefer partners with the same background. And most people, especially women, prefer partners who can support kids. What’s wrong with that? People in minorities may have fewer options and so may have to make some trade-offs which people in the majority don’t have to make.”

* “Founded in 1864, Gallaudet University, in Washington, D.C., was the first school for the advanced education of the deaf and hard of hearing in the world and remains the only higher education institution in which all programs and services are designed to accommodate deaf and hard of hearing students.”—Wikipedia, *Gallaudet University*.

“But will they *love* their traded-off second choice? He said to warn you that Pearl will never be grateful for the hearing life you will give up for her, you will waste the effort you make to accommodate her handicap, and you are better off sleeping with your own kind. Derrick, that’s exactly what he said.”

Even though I didn’t share the opinion of Virgil’s friend, I should have asked Virgil to put me in touch with him to learn why his experience had led him to think like this. Perhaps he had been rejected by a lovely deaf woman. Perhaps I might have learned from his mistakes.

“I’m thinking of riding with Pearl to Leo’s wedding in Tepic. That will be our acid test. You learn a lot about your friends on a motorcycle odyssey. Didn’t *we*?” I took my photos of Pearl out of my backpack and handed them to Rhea. Rhea looked at them and passed them to Virgil.

“She looks good,” said Virgil, “and she looks happy with you. I never liked Eugénie. She was so full of herself.”

“I should have known it was over when she handed me *The Feminine Mystique*. I was in denial for a long time.”

Virgil and I rode the cablecar across the river, climbed in his truck, and drove half an hour to a gravel lane. The lane wound behind a bank of trees to a two-story house. Smoke drifted from its chimney. Scraps of vehicles littered the yard, testimony to the rural conundrum of too much time and too little money. Virgil opened the door, and we walked into the warm and cozy house.

A woman in flared denim pants, a blue-and-white quilted cowboy shirt, and leather moccasins sat on the sofa smoking a cigarette and munching potato chips while watching television. “Jim—they’re here!” the woman, Bev, shouted. “You guys want coffee?”

We sat down at the kitchen table. Nescafé, Coffee-mate, and sugar sat next to a chrome-plated toaster. Bev served mugs of hot water for instant coffee. In a moment Jim, a bear of a man, pounded up the stairs from the basement. Dust and dirt speckled his overalls. I took a metal box with a meter and knobs out of my backpack and handed it to him.

“I built this for Virgil when he was so worried Snowslide was bugged that he wouldn’t say any suspicious words to me when I visited. He’d write them and burn them. I wanted to help him recover his sanity.”

1984: Passion

Virgil held a finger to his lips to tell me to shut up until I had finished checking the house. Jim looked at my device and handed it back without a word. I plugged an earphone into the detector, adjusted it, and listened.

“Turn off the power,” I whispered.

Jim went downstairs. A minute later, the refrigerator stopped, and the house was silent. I extended the antenna and listened to the detector.

“KING radio in Seattle. Let’s go outside,” I whispered.

While I operated the detector, we walked around the house, pigsty, and chicken coop. I shook my head. We went in the back door and shuffled through every room. I shook my head again. Jim took a deep breath. We walked down the stairs to a dark and musty basement, and Jim bolted the door behind us. The power to the house was still off. Only a few rays of light scattered from curtained light-wells near the ceiling. Jim turned on a flashlight. I saw piles of matting and a half-upholstered sofa next to a workbench littered with fabric and tools. Jim pushed aside a stack of cartons to reveal a bookcase full of foam rubber and fabric. He pushed the bookcase aside and pushed a key into a hole in the plywood panel behind it. A hidden door swung open. Balsamic air floated out. Virgil and I followed Jim through the door. Jim closed it gently. There was utter silence, as if we had entered a cave. Jim was pointing his flashlight at my detector.

“Nothing,” I said. “There is no radio transmitter in your house.”

Jim exhaled with a sigh. “Good. I’ll go turn the power on.”

He left Virgil and me in total darkness. Soon there was a *thud* and a hum, and we were blinded by bluish light revealing rows of waist-high plants running the width of the basement. A few minutes later, Jim returned and checked a thermometer on the white-painted wall.

“One fan stays on to vent the smell to the roof. The pigsty, chicken coop, and onion garden are only there to cover the smell.” Jim rolled a joint while Virgil passed cocaine around. “I told my kids that the basement disappeared, and if they don’t want their house impounded, they don’t go downstairs! My worry is my power bill. These are thousand-watt bulbs, and I use enough power for ten houses. The DEA will audit power bills someday. I want to retire first, like Virgil.”

1984: Passion

“Do you mean the upholstery business is just a cover-up?”

“You got it—the DEA will catch me if I have a big house but no taxable income. This is my finishing room.” Jim led us through a door into a room about half the size of the first. “This is my growing room, with Vita-Lites. My babies stay here three weeks before they go to the finishing room.” Jim led us into the third, still smaller room. “I start here from imported seeds. The seeds are legal in most countries, but not here in the Land of the Free.” Jim closed every door and rearranged the bookcase, cartons, and upholstery debris to cover our tracks. It felt like Anne Frank’s attic, but it was a basement.

While I rode home, the forest air stroked my face as the headlight’s light tunnel pushed aside the darkness between the damp pavement and the violet sky. It had been a beautiful day, and I didn’t look forward to going back to my desk job. Ever since my first visit to Snowslide six years before, when Virgil lived in a cabin with kerosene lamps, I had dreamed of living on land like Virgil’s. But first I had to save money, and saving money had been impossible while supporting Eugénie.

I received a call at work from a man with a French accent. “This is Human Resources Development Canada, Bernard speaking. Have you heard of our Program for Equal Employment of the Challenged? Would your company be interested in hiring a *Challenger*? A blind person?”

“Sorry, no. In a small office like ours, everyone has to do many tasks.”

“She can do transcription for you. The federal government pays for her vision aids and for half of her wages, too. Everybody wins!”

“But only if her output is at least half of normal output.”

“How big is your office?”

“Twenty-five staff.”

“*Bon!* We will give you 15 Dictaphone recorders and a transcriber. Your staff dictates, and she types. If she doesn’t stay after two months, you have lost only one month pay.”

“But how can blind people do copy-typing? It doesn’t make sense.”

“Trust us—we are Human Resources Development Canada.”

My boss agreed to give it a try. The transcription equipment was delivered, and the blind typist arrived. Her tools were an IBM Selectric

1984: Passion

typewriter, a magnifying glass, a government-provided Dictaphone transcriber, and a bottle of white lacquer.

It is hard for people today to imagine how difficult typing was in the days before word processors and why copy-typing was a profession. On a typewriter, a single wrong character could be covered by a daub of white lacquer and then corrected by retyping onto it, but, even so, it would be obvious that a correction had been made. An error in a letter to a client meant that the whole page had to be retyped.

We did our best to work together, but because she couldn't see her mistakes, the experience was as frustrating for her as it was for us. Our blind typist managed to complete only a few pages per day. We said farewell after a month but kept the free Dictaphones.

Jul: Pearl Hits Bull's-Eye, Moves In

I kissed Pearl, put my .22 rifle and cartridges in the trunk of her car, and climbed in. We drove to Jeff's flat in the sunshine, the car windows rolled down in the heat. Pearl introduced me to Jeff, her previous lover, by fingerspelling. Jeff could barely fit in the undersized back seat.

"You two talk," Pearl signed to me. "No problem for me." We drove off. Pearl glanced at Jeff in her rearview mirror from time to time.

"Pearl needs to concentrate on driving," said Jeff, "not trying to lipread me in the rearview mirror."

"How did you meet Pearl, Jeff?"

"Her friend Jodi is my friend Gavin's girlfriend. Pearl never has a notepad, on principle, so I spent an evening memorizing the manual alphabet so I could talk to Pearl while Gavin was busy with Jodi."

"Why only fingerspelling? Why not learn some signs?"

"I only pick fights I can win. Learning to sign ASL is like learning to play the guitar. It's easy to do badly, hard to do well."

"What do you do for a living?"

"Real estate—now also for deaf clients." Jeff grinned.

"So you didn't learn to fingerspell only for Pearl."

"That's true, but that's why I started it. It's a challenge. Try

1984: Passion

explaining ‘nothing could be further from the truth’ to Pearl. I used a dictionary. I used a notepad. I used a diagram. I gave up.”

Jeff and I heard a police siren wail. Pearl saw flashing police lights in her mirror and pulled over.

“Turn the radio up. Tune it between stations, and shut up,” said Jeff.

A policeman approached. “Your license, registration, and insurance, please,” he said through the open window. The car radio roared static.

“I’m deaf,” Pearl signed.

The policeman looked past her to Jeff and me. “Are you deaf?”

“Deaf,” we signed, nodding.

The policeman wrote something in his notebook and showed it to Pearl. Slowly, Pearl unlocked the glovebox and removed the papers. She passed them to the policeman. Meanwhile, Jeff and I discussed the weather in fingerspelling and sign language.

The policeman had written a note to tell Pearl that she was speeding, but he would give her a warning instead of a ticket. Pearl wrote a note promising to be more careful. After he drove away, I turned the radio off, and we all roared with laughter.

“You were wonderful actors,” Pearl fingerspelled, laughing loudly.

“Cops give deafies a break,” said Jeff, fingerspelling as spoke. “Most deafies are safe drivers—when you can’t hear, you keep your eyes open.”

“I never had an accident or a ticket. But deafies have to be careful with police not to be shot reaching for a notepad because he thinks we are reaching for a gun,” signed Pearl, as I interpreted.

“I travel with a cop. When Constable Leo and I ride our motorcycles, they can’t give me a ticket but only give him a warning. Police love to stop motorcycles because it’s safer than stopping a car full of people.”

“Clever. I think you are a good fixer,” signed Pearl.

As we drove off, I stopped interpreting so Pearl could concentrate.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve gone shooting at a rifle range. I’ve got a scoped and calibrated 30-06 hunting rifle,” said Jeff.

“Why didn’t you bring it today?” I said.

“It’s up north. My friend and I are getting set up with supplies.”

“Why up north? If disaster strikes, you’re here in Vancouver.”

“My friend has access to a helicopter—that’s all I’m saying.”

1984: Passion

“You’re a survivalist, then?”

“Let’s just say I’ll do whatever I need to do to survive,” said Jeff.

Pearl pulled into the Barnet Rifle Club parking lot. The sound of gunfire crackled through the air. I took my rifle out of the car.

“An AR7,” said Jeff. “The US Air Force survival gun—this is a *tool*.”

Jeff rented a bolt-action rifle, and all of us rented hearing protectors. We sat at a table in the shooting gallery. With the hearing protectors on, Jeff and I fingerspelled to each other and to Pearl, who was the only woman on the range. We jumped from an explosion at the next table. A shooter in a red quilted shirt had fired a hunting rifle.

“I heard that and felt that, too,” Pearl signed.

“That cartridge must have cost him two bucks,” fingerspelled Jeff.

I loaded and fired two shots at the 100-meter target, hitting it on one side. Jeff took two shots with his rifle, missing the target completely. I helped Pearl to hold and aim my gun. She fired and hit the target, and when she saw the hole in it she grinned from ear to ear. She fired again and hit a bull’s-eye. We all took turns, Pearl using both rifles.

“Let’s try the 300-meter target.” Jeff and I hit the distant target occasionally, but Pearl hit it often. Meanwhile, the hunting rifle next to us roared again. We turned to the shooter.

“Do you want to try this one?” the shooter signed to Pearl. Jeff and I were astonished he could sign, but not Pearl.

“Fine,” signed Pearl.

“Hold it firmly,” he signed.

He lifted the heavy rifle into her arms. Pearl raised it, sighted the target, and fired. The recoil knocked her shoulder back. She lay down the weapon and checked the target through the spotting telescope.

“The center,” she signed, beaming.

“My cousin is deaf, and he’s a good shot, too,” signed the shooter.

After an hour, we ran out of ammunition. During the cease-fire, we gathered our targets, returned the rented items, and walked outside. Jeff handed the target with the bull’s-eye to Pearl, as a souvenir.

While Pearl drove, Jeff continued talking to me from the back seat. It is awkward to sign while driving, so my drives with Pearl usually included little conversation except at traffic lights.

1984: Passion

“Pearl’s at home on the range,” said Jeff. “Lock up your ammunition, and don’t mess with her. She’s incredible—I hope it works out for both of you. Listen to her dreams. Help her finish things she starts. Did you see the crochets at her place? Did you ever see a finished one?”

“No.”

“You see? Her relationships, too. You would expect her to be tough after what she’s been through, but she’s a sucker. Ever heard of *est*?”

“Vaguely. What’s *est*?”

“Werner Erhard’s feel-good self-esteem factory, the biggest scam on the planet. Pay \$300 to forget your old personality, find your new self, and set yourself free to be your own boss.”

Pearl noticed we were speaking more quietly. I turned on the radio and tuned in a station, trying to feign disinterest in what Jeff had to say.

“Did you try to talk her out of it?”

“It didn’t work. Pearl invited me, so I saw it myself. You share your life in four-day seminars, 14 hours at a stretch, with no bathroom breaks or wristwatches. You listen to crap, like facts have no meaning—our *stories* give facts meaning. Ride your horse in the direction he’s going. If you keep saying it the way it is, your word is law in the universe. Sign up for special courses! Bring your friends! Pearl is keeping it a secret because participants swear that they will not tell anyone the contents because that would spoil the show for others when they take the course—and make it unlikely that anyone else would sign up. Then they get the participants to “volunteer” to work, for free, for a corporation as if it were a church. Pearl did. I didn’t, and they hassled me for weeks.”

I didn’t know it, but Pearl’s ongoing interest in what is today called Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) suggested she lacked a fully integrated personality or suffered from depression.

Pearl dropped Jeff off and drove us to my place. When I opened my door, the aroma of beef stew wafted out. I pointed at my slow cooker.

“This is how I welcome myself home as a single man.”

After dinner, I put my Walther box on the kitchen table. I opened it, took the empty magazine out of the pistol, pulled the slide back to prove it was unloaded, and handed my new toy to Pearl.

“Why do you own a gun?” she signed.

1984: Passion

“For shooting with Leo. I just bought it. I didn’t shoot it yet.”

“Why didn’t you bring it with us for shooting today?”

“I don’t have a permit to carry it there, so it has to stay here.”

After my beef bourguignon dinner with baguette and wine, we continued signing in a bubble bath. It was great not to need the notepad anymore. In bed, Pearl turned off the lights, wrapped my hands around hers under the sheets, and formed signs. We usually left a night-light on so we could keep chatting side-by-side with our arms above the sheets; now it was as if we were deaf-blind except that the deaf and blind use a manual alphabet, which is slower but is easier to read by touch. I traced the shape of each sign in her hand with my fingers.

“I love you,” she signed.

Pearl loved being hugged, but she made love as if it were for the sake of the relationship. I knew sex would never play a leading role in our relationship, yet I still loved Pearl. Questions flowed through my mind. What was it like to live without sound, except for a trace of useless noise? Could I help Pearl to live better? If I devoted myself to her, would she devote herself to me in the way that Eugénie had not?

“I miss you when you aren’t visiting,” I signed, cooking a breakfast of *huevos rancheros* with tortillas and beans. “These are called refried beans. Mexicans say that’s because they never do anything right the first time.”

“I understand that joke.” Pearl smiled.

“Live with me. You can stop paying rent. I will share everything.”

Pearl hugged me. “We can be together every day.”

Even though we were in love, we had made a decision which was more practical than romantic: it would save both of us money. We were content to live together while leaving our options open. We didn’t discuss the timing for starting a family or when I might divorce Eugénie and we might marry; it was the same casual way that Eugénie and I began living together so long ago, with no long-term plan.

“We can store your furniture in your condo until it sells. I can swap my car for Eugénie’s bicycle that matches mine so we can cycle together. Your car is enough for two of us, and I have the motorcycle. We can share a bank account and credit cards. I know I can trust you.”

1984: Passion

“That isn’t the sign for *trust*—it’s the sign for *penis*. Those two signs are similar: trust-penis-trust-penis.”

I laughed. “You should never trust a penis.”

“You can teach me computer to manage our bank account.”

“Fine. How much notice do you have to give your landlord?”

“What do you mean, ‘notice?’”

“You have to tell the landlord before you go—how many months?”

Pearl looked puzzled.

“Show me your lease and I will write your notice letter for you.”

Pearl kissed me. “When we reduce our costs, we can afford a vacation together. I didn’t have a vacation for one year.”

“Do you want to ride to Leo’s wedding in September? What do you think about a month on a motorcycle? You will need a hard ass.”

“It will be romantic. But I only get three weeks’ vacation.”

“I can leave a few days before you and return a few days after you. You fly and meet me.” I showed Pearl my well-worn map. “I can reach Mazatlán in four or five days. Then we’ll ride to Tepic and stay there for two days for Leo’s wedding. From there, we can reach Guatemala in a week.”

“I saw on TV there is a war there.”

“The war is in the jungle. Tourists on the main roads are left alone.”

I bumped my mug while signing and spilled my coffee.

“Spilling your drink is a sign of good deaf conversation.”

“Is there a sign for Guatemala?” I fingerspelled “Guatemala.”

“Not in Canada. Just fingerspell it.”

“Maybe this?” To make a sign for Guatemala, I signed the sign for “nervous” but replaced the “N” which forms part of the sign with a “G.”

Pearl chuckled. “Good invention—easy to remember!”

“After Guatemala, we can go to Belize. We can scuba dive the Caribbean reefs.”

“I’ll be nervous to fly to Mexico alone. What if you aren’t there?”

“I will tell the airline you are deaf. You will get assistance. I will phone you the night before you fly. If I don’t call, then you don’t fly.”

“You must phone me every night.”

“I can’t. I will camp in the forest when it doesn’t rain—no phone.”

1984: Passion

Someday I want to ride all the way to South America. I hate turning around after two weeks.”

“Don’t hate—happiness is accepting what *is*. I will explain my philosophy to you when the time is right.”

Our lives changed quickly. Pearl moved in with me in August, six months after we met. I reserved a U-Haul truck, collected cartons from the supermarket, and bought Pearl a negligee as a welcome gift. We measured our furniture, snipped paper models to scale, and slid the pieces around on a floor plan to predict which piece would fit where and which leftovers would have to be stored in her condominium.

On moving day, I collected the U-Haul truck and parked it next to her apartment. When I rang the bell and entered, I found Pearl distraught—angry at the world, furious with herself.

“Blender, camera, suitcase, vacuum, the pictures my sister painted, all gone. I put them in my car last night to be ready to move today. Thieves broke into my car. Why always *me*?” I hugged Pearl as she started to cry. “But they dumped my diving equipment all over the parking lot.”

“Stupid thieves—those are the most expensive items, and so easy to sell. Cheer up; we don’t need two vacuum cleaners. Get a police report to make an insurance claim.”

Pearl pulled a folder labeled “Insurance” from a cardboard carton and handed it to me.

“It’s expired. You filed an expired policy from your old address.”

I surprised by her naïveté, both in filling her car with valuables in an unsecured parking lot and in letting her insurance lapse.

“I have too many problems for one lifetime.”

I handed her a key. “My home is our home. I will help you with these things, so this will not happen again.”

It took most of the day to move her surplus furniture to her condo. I smashed my shin on the truck’s steel loading gate while signing and limped for the rest of the day. I set up Pearl’s TTY, telephone flasher, doorbell flasher, caption decoder, and silent alarm clock. Pearl made the bed, tucking the end of the sheets under the mattress and folding them under the sides to form a perfect 45-degree angle at each corner.

1984: Passion

“No wrinkles. School was like this, like the army. Every day we made our beds this way. If they were not perfect, we were punished.”

I lay down on the bed to test Pearl’s alarm clock. “A back massage instead of a bell to wake me up. I like it. Let’s eat at the Kamei Sushi.”

As we walked to the restaurant holding hands, a panhandler crossed our path. “Spare change?”

“We’re deaf. We don’t understand,” Pearl signed.

“Ears like shit—not work,” I signed.

The beggar held out his hand, palm up. Pearl and I shrugged at each other and walked off.

“Fucking dummies!” he shouted at our backs.

In the restaurant, I told her what he said, and we burst into laughter.

Our shared telephone line turned out to be a nuisance. I could respond to hearing or TTY calls, but a hearing caller who called when I was out would hear only beeping tones, and Pearl would become annoyed picking up voice calls she couldn’t answer. She worried that this created a security risk because hearing callers would learn she was at home alone. The solution was a machine that would answer all calls.

It would also benefit callers because, in the 1980s, if someone called when no one was home, the caller had to try again later; there was no way to know that anyone had called at all. Home answering machines were so rare that they often didn’t work because callers would hang up rather than talk to a machine. I bought an answering machine and put voice *and* TTY greetings into its outgoing cassette tape which were played sequentially. “Please wait for the message after the tones” in my voice was followed by “Please leave a message for Pearl” in TTY tones followed by “I am not available to take your call right now, so please leave me a message after the beep” in voice. A hearing caller would ignore the tones, and a deaf caller would ignore the apparent voice. If Pearl was home when a TTY message came in, she could see the text in the TTY and take the call. If we had both been out and a caller had left a message, she would play it back when she returned. A TTY message appeared as text on the TTY, but when a voice message was played, her TTY screen displayed a blinking light; Pearl would then put her hand on the speaker and feel the vibration to confirm it was a voice message.

1984: Passion

It worked great, and Pearl was impressed. I loved to find solutions like this for her.

Pearl, Jeff, and I took scuba diving lessons from Jeff's friend. I was impressed by how easily Pearl mastered the theory and pencil-and-paper calculation of the all-important decompression tables. Pearl had her own scuba gear. I bought a few pieces for myself and rented the rest.

My face mask leaked, so our instructor suggested I shave off my mustache for a more watertight seal. Pearl agreed, saying my mustache made me look gay. I shaved it off for her, and I never grew one again.

During our first open water dive, in West Vancouver, we discovered that the drysuit Pearl bought from Elizabeth was too large, so it trapped air and she floated like a balloon. While we stood in cold, chest-high surf, our instructor added weights to her belt while Jeff pressed the air release valve and I hugged her to squeeze the air out of her suit. At last, Pearl sank. The three of us submerged to join her underwater to continue our lesson. As we swam into deeper water, the remaining air in her suit shifted to her boots. She kicked furiously as she struggled to stay level. The instructor gave the signal for us to surface.

When I surfaced, I saw two neoprene legs and fins pointing at the sky. Pearl was floating upside down at her knees, her legs kicking furiously and helplessly in the air. Jeff, the instructor, and I took the regulators out of our mouths and howled with laughter at one of the funniest sights I had ever seen. The three of us inverted Pearl by force so that the surplus air moved to her shoulders, and she now floated upright.

"That's not funny!" Pearl spat out seawater with a grin.

"Bring her up higher. Inflate her suit a bit more," said the instructor.

I groped under the water for her inflator hose. I took the corrugated black hose, pressed the valve open, and blew a lungful of air into her suit.

Pearl screamed. "*My tit!*"

I had forgotten to start blowing air *before* I opened the valve, so I had blown a spoonful of seawater into her drysuit along with the air. We all shared contagious laughter at the farce. Pearl was a good sport.

I looked forward to every day I spent with Pearl, my life partner. It felt like my early years with Eugénie, when being half of a couple had

been as important to her as it was to me. I hoped our happiness would continue forever.

Sep: Guatemala by Motorcycle

At dawn on departure day, I put on my leathers. Pearl helped me carry my gear down to the motorcycle. I packed it, put on my helmet, started the engine, and signed. "If you arrive in Mazatlán and I'm not there, go to the Holiday Inn. Wait for me to arrive or call. Do you understand?"

Pearl nodded nervously. "I am happy your sister will stay with me while you ride to Mazatlán so you can telephone me through her."

I kissed Pearl goodbye and rode off. Two hours later, I arrived at Virgil's cablecar platform, blew the horn, and waited. Virgil rolled across the cable and looked down. "*Man on a mission*. Just look at all this gear."

"Join me, Virgil. Jesus, I'd love to ride with you again."

"Never again. I'd kill myself riding too fast. Son of a bitch, man. I can't believe you're riding a bike to Central America." Virgil put a thimble-sized vial of cocaine in my hand. "Two grams. Have the ride of your life."

I carved a recess into my helmet padding with my pocketknife and nestled the vial in it. I put my helmet on and started the engine. We hugged. Riding is dangerous, and we knew each ride could be our last.

"Keep the rubber side down. Remember, *bakeries*, Derrick. Judge a town by its bakery. If there's no bakery, don't stop. Ride on to the next town."

I rode off. A few minutes later, I pulled over and snorted half a capful from the vial. It was going to be a good ride.

The third afternoon, I reached Tucson. I pulled into the EZ-Rest Motel, checked in, and rode to U-Haul where I rented a locker to cache my leathers, warm clothing, and camping gear. Back in the motel, I showered off 3,000 kilometers of dirt and sweat, stretched out on the bed, and read the instructions on the Magic Fingers bed-massage coin box. A black-and-white television sat on a Formica table. The table's edges had rows of black lines where cigarette butts had smoldered. I

1984: Passion

removed the vial from my helmet, tapped some cocaine into a piece of glossy magazine paper, and folded the paper into my wallet. I went for a walk, cached the vial inside the top of a rotten fence post far from the motel, and called home from a payphone.

“Nadine, I’m in Tucson. Tomorrow I’ll be in Mexico. How is she?”

“Pearl’s fine. She’s been waiting for your call. She says she loves you.”

“Tell her I love her. The day after tomorrow, I’ll be in Mazatlán before her plane arrives. She doesn’t have to worry. Be sure she packs and brings everything on the checklist.”

“Pearl says she has something else to bring to you.”

“It had better be tiny.”

Nadine laughed. “It’s a hug and a kiss.”

I laughed. “I won’t phone from Mexico unless there is a problem. Thanks for helping. I hope you two had a good time together.”

“Yes, but I got writer’s cramp and decided to take a sign language—*beep!*” Our connection dropped as the payphone money ran out.

I woke up before dawn, ate muesli and milk, and rode off in the chilly morning desert air. Tucson’s lights shrank in the mirrors as the suburbs and farms gave way to sagebrush, saguaro, and mesas, tan-colored in the glow of daybreak. As the sun broke, I stopped by a bullet-riddled highway sign, took the folded paper from my wallet, snorted its contents, licked it clean, and tore it to pieces. I rode off, the twin-cylinder boxer engine throbbing between my legs. I admired some of the most vivid painted landscapes in the world on the way through Calabasas to the Mexican border. I couldn’t have asked for more.

The Nogales border crossing was backed up with trucks. I split lanes, pulled up to the checkpoint, completed the formalities, and began riding the 1,200 kilometers of winding highway to the sticky coastal humidity of Mazatlán. On the two-lane road with no shoulders, disaster to a motorcyclist lurked around every corner: gravel, oil, potholes, livestock, dogs, trucks, and *topes*. *Topes*—speed bumps—seemed to be placed at random, as if to dispose of surplus asphalt. Vultures perched on roadside carrion.

On the fifth day, I reached the Gulf of California. As I passed the Tropic of Cancer sign, I thought of the photo I had taken there three

1984: Passion

years before: Eugénie stood in front of that sign next to the BMW, back when I believed that after seven years, we would be together forever.

Farther south, the road became straight, banked on both sides by fields of September corn. There was little traffic, and it was like riding through a slot cut through a green hedge. As I neared Mazatlán, I picked up speed to be sure I'd be at the airport well before Pearl arrived.

I almost didn't arrive at all.

At 4,200 kilometers from home, about 200 meters ahead of me, a cow walked out from the cornfield and stood in the center of the road. My tires squealed as I wrestled the motorcycle down from highway speed and halted, my front wheel stopping just under the cow's belly. The cow stared at me, bellowed, and disappeared into the wall of corn on the other side. The brakes smelled burned. My hands were trembling. If I had seen the cow a second later, I would have smashed into it. I rode the last 50 kilometers to Mazatlán airport at a snail's pace, still shaking.

Pearl walked into the arrival hall. One hand carried her nylon bag with her helmet and travel gear; the other carried the Samsonite holding our formals for the wedding. She looked stiff, nervous, and frightened, but when she saw me, the tension drained from her body and she drooped like a deflated doll. We were both exhausted.

"I was so worried. Did you have problems riding here?"

"Only a crazy cow. Let's go. Leo and Maria must be waiting."

We walked out of the air-conditioned terminal.

"My God, it's so *hot*," signed Pearl. "The bike is filthy. Look at the bugs on the front! The license plate is completely covered with dirt."

I put her bag into the pannier and strapped the Samsonite onto the rack. We put our helmets on and rode off under the scorching sun, a 300-kilometer ride to Tepic. The landscape shimmered in the withering heat. Up a hill and around a bend, a black cloud of swirling exhaust fumes blanketed the highway like a smokescreen. We rode through the inky tornado, coughing, and passed the truck belching it. The sign on the bumper said *Dios permíteme mi regreso*—God allows my return.

An hour later, we pulled into a grimy Pemex station and, after refueling, sat down in a roadside café. A strip of speckled yellow flypaper

1984: Passion

spiraled down from the ceiling over each table. Outside, children pelted a *piñata* with a stick. There was no TV, no air-conditioning, no Muzak. For music, we could drop a peso into a Wurlitzer.

“Eat. I will introduce you to Mexico. This is my fifth trip.”

“Why do you like Mexico so much?”

“Adventure.” I pointed to the *huevos rancheros* on the menu. “Real Mexican food. With *café con leche*.”

A young girl served chilled eggs, refried beans, and slices of Bimbo bleached bread on chipped stoneware. She laid a straw basket of fresh tortillas wrapped in cloth on the red-and-white tablecloth and returned with two mugs of steaming milk. I opened the jar of Nescafé and scooped a teaspoon into each mug. Pearl wiped a finger on her arm and showed me a black fingertip. She stuck out her tongue.

I smiled. “We will be dirty every day.”

“You went far in five days.”

“They were long days, but Virgil gave me some cocaine.”

“Motorcycle riding makes me want to pee.”

I handed Pearl a waterproof bag of tissue and pointed to a door. She came back a few minutes later and signed, “It *stinks!* I couldn’t sit. My legs are tired from squatting. Mexican woman must get constipated.”

“Never! Mexican food prevents constipation.”

We laughed. All eyes in the café followed our signing as we paid the bill and walked to the motorcycle for the final run to Tepic.

As we parked at the Hotel Fray Junipero Serra, I looked up to see McGuire, Leo’s colleague, sitting behind a steel-grated window on the second floor and drinking a can of Tecate beer.

“When did you get in?” I shouted.

“Yesterday! I’ve been to Maria’s already. They’re waiting for you. I’m your police escort to the pre-nuptial feast. How was the road?”

“It was like potholes stuck together with a bit of asphalt.”

“Delouse yourselves, and call room 314 when you’re done. I’ll try to be drunk by then.”

Pearl and I showered off our grime and joined McGuire for the taxi ride to Maria’s. In the taxi, McGuire drank Presidente brandy from a bottle while I tried to record our route on a piece of paper.

1984: Passion

We were welcomed both as friends of the groom and as foreigners. I interpreted between English and ASL while Maria interpreted between Spanish and English. Between drinks of brandy, beer, and Canadian Club, which Maria's father thought wise to have on hand for us, there were questions about Canada, deafness, and motorcycles. The extended family and neighbors filled the house and spilled out onto the sidewalk.

"¡Salud!" I toasted to Maria's father.

"Salud, dinero, y amor," he replied.

"Y el tiempo para gustarlos," Maria added.

"To health, money, and love," I said, "and the time to enjoy them."

Pearl held up her glass. "Here, now, I have all four."

In the morning, Leo and Maria picked us up and drove to the beach at San Blas. We spread out a sheet, slathered on sunscreen, and lay down on the sand in our bathing suits.

"Our favorite beach," said Leo. "Only locals, so we'll be left in peace."

"At last! I hope the brakes on the highway trucks are as well maintained as their horns," I signed and said.

Pearl looked at McGuire's arm. "A tattoo. You don't look like a cop."

"McGuire's a good cop, but he has to wear a long-sleeve shirt around Maria's family," said Leo.

"It takes one to know one," grinned McGuire.

"It can also take two to know one," signed Pearl.

"That idiom means that people understand people who are like themselves," I signed and said.

"You mean, only a deafie understands a deafie?" signed Pearl.

"I hope that's not true."

McGuire pulled cool bottles of Dos Equis beer from the cooler and studied the labels. "No expiry date—we'd better test them." He downed a bottle in one quaff. "That one passed."

"Let me test," said Leo. He drank a bottle in one go. "Derrick and Pearl, you'd guys better test some, too."

We swam and ate our picnic lunch. Maria took Pearl's hand and walked with her along the shore, looking for a place they could pee.

"Too bad your wife couldn't ride with you, McGuire," I said.

"Someone has to care for the kids. ¡Salud!" He drank the last bottle.

1984: Passion

In the morning, we put on our formal clothes and walked to the cathedral. Leo handed me his camera and asked me to be the wedding photographer. He was married to Maria in Spanish on 11 September, understanding neither the ceremony nor the documents he signed. While walking around and taking photos, I did my best to interpret from Spanish to ASL, providing a sideshow for all the wedding guests.

The reception was happy and drunken. Pearl, McGuire, and I sat at the head table with the parents, maid of honor, bride, and groom. Pearl exchanged notes with McGuire while I talked to Maria's sister in Spanish. The guests pinned hundred-peso notes on Leo's and Maria's clothes while we danced to pop, mariachi, and Jorge Negrete music. We had a wonderful time, but a sign behind the bar reminded us *Después de el Borracho Viene la Cruda*—after the bender, the hangover comes.

Pearl and I stored the Samsonite with our formal clothes at Maria's. In the morning, we bade farewell and headed south. We rode along the coast through Barra de Navidad and stopped at mid-afternoon in a small Playa Azul beachside hotel. We began the first installment of our daily afternoon routine of unloading, unpacking, hand laundry, cleaning mirrors and lights, checking tires, lights, oil, and control cables, and catching up on the events of the day.

Pearl put on her black one-piece bathing suit. We swam in the blue-green ocean and beachcombed the quiet beach. We sat on our towels on the sand, where a waiter brought us margaritas.

"Five hundred kilometers today. Are you still afraid?" I signed.

"Not now. This is romantic. You are wonderful to bring me. But don't look back—a man on the beach is watching."

"Your radar is always scanning. Of course, he stares. He never sees sign language. This is my kind of place, just locals and us, not like the big resort towns."

"Did you come here before?"

"Not this far. Eugénie and I turned around at Puerto Vallarta."

"Do you still think about Eugénie?"

"No, but at first it was hard. Remember when you were small, and you didn't recognize your house when you came home from vacation? I

1984: Passion

felt like that when Eugénie moved out.”

“I felt like that every time I came home from boarding school.”

“I carried her stuff for her. Then I came home to start my life over again.”

The man on the beach approached us, smiling. Pearl and I were astonished when he started to sign.

“I don’t understand Mexican sign language,” Pearl signed.

I borrowed a pencil and paper from the waiter. The man wrote neatly in Spanish. I translated for Pearl as best I could.

“*Good afternoon. Where are you from?*” he wrote in Spanish.

“Canada,” I said, startling the man, who had assumed I was deaf.

“Are you going to Mexico City?” he said in Spanish.

“Yes, in two weeks if we have time,” I said in Spanish, then signed.

“There is a deaf café in Mexico City. Everyone there understands sign language. It’s near the Palace of Fine Arts. I recommend it.”

Pearl was very excited. “Wonderful! We will look for it.”

“Will you visit my village in the nearby bay? I invite you to come.”

“No, we can’t,” signed Pearl.

“Sorry,” I said in Spanish. “We must ride early tomorrow morning.”

The man smiled, bade us farewell, and wandered off.

“You are too adventurous. Did you see his eyes?” signed Pearl.

“I thought he was an honest fisherman. I think he was disappointed not to have Canadians visit his home. I wanted to go.”

“If we visit, he will ask for money or steal the motorcycle. Now he knows that the big motorcycle is *ours*.”

At dawn, we began our morning routine of repacking, eating *huevos rancheros*, and checking the clouds. We moved quickly because a late start meant a short day, and we had to avoid riding at night—daylight was essential to avoid wheel-breaking potholes, animals, and cars without headlights. The roadside crucifixes where drivers had died were reminders of the risks we took. We knew the Mexican right-of-way: trucks, buses, vans, cars, motorcycles, bicycles, pedestrians, and dogs.

We stayed no more than one night in each town, alternating long and short days. The BMW attracted attention in villages as if we were a one-

1984: Passion

vehicle parade. Pearl amused herself by waving to children on the side of the road. I often heard Pearl laugh. The farther south we rode and the smaller the village, the more attention we received.

We rode to Acapulco, where our hotel faced the famous beach. As soon as we spread our towel on the sand, hawkers swarmed around us to sell *serapes*, towels, sandals, time-share condominiums, and drugs. As soon as one peddler was waved away, another came to take his place.

“What a difference from Playa Azul,” I signed.

“I feel like I am meat, and they are flies.” We picked up the towels and moved farther from the hotel to avoid the hawkers.

“It doesn’t matter what we do. They bother hearies and deafies exactly the same.”

Pearl laughed. “We are equal here. There were so many children on the road today. My arms are tired from waving. I want to wave at every kid who waves at me.” A breaker rolled in and knocked us backward, and we dug our heels into the sand as the backwash tried to suck us out to sea. “My crotch is full of sand.” She walked into the surf and rinsed her bathing suit under the water.

Two nymphs in tangas were speaking English. I overheard the word *deaf*, and I turned to them. “Where are you from?” I signed and said.

They jumped. “Oh, *wow*, you can talk! We thought you were deaf. We’re from Seattle. We flew in yesterday. How about you?”

“We’re from Vancouver. We rode here today, but we go on tomorrow to Guatemala, on our motorcycle.”

“*You rode here on a motorcycle?*” they said in unison, dumbfounded.

We wrung out our towels and walked away, chuckling. A ragged girl followed us, begging in English, Spanish, and German. I interpreted her requests but didn’t look back or speak. She also begged by gesture and touched the back of our legs, and each time she touched us, we swatted her hand away.

Pearl could take no more of being poked. She turned and signed angrily, “What do you want?”

The little girl held out her hand, palm up, with an irresistible smile. I put a peso coin in it. She nodded sadly at her paltry return on 15 minutes of her time, and she walked away, sure that we were both deaf.

1984: Passion

“You should not give money. Don’t have pity.”

“She may be beaten if she gets nothing. I paid her for a lesson in persistence.” I kissed the back of Pearl’s neck. She shivered as an electric shock passed through her body. “Let’s have dinner. We’ll eat well here. This is our last beach stop for a while.”

Farther south, in the state of Oaxaca, we were stopped at a military checkpoint. “*Pasaporte,*” demanded an officer, supported by a dozen soldiers in fatigues and carrying machine guns. “*Documentos, por favor.*”

“*Momentito.*” I parked on the shoulder. We dismounted and undid our jeans, pulled out our money belts, and extracted our passports. We put the belts back into our pants, and only after our pants were fastened did I hand our passports to the officer.

He thumbed through the passports, jerked his head toward the panniers, and asked me if we had guns. I said no. He returned our passports, and we rode off. We stopped a few minutes later to repack.

“I was scared to be taking off my pants in front of many men,” signed Pearl. “Their uniforms were worn and patched.”

“He did not ask for a bribe. He wanted to know if we carried guns.”

Two hours farther, there was another roadblock. We danced our pants down—pants up revue again. “¿*Quantos barricadas hay?*” I said.

“*Casi cada doscientos kilómetros mas o menos hasta Tapachula.*”

“There will be roadblocks every two hours,” I signed, to the astonishment of the officer. “I’ll keep our passports in my shirt pocket.”

As we rode farther south, we entered a rainforest of broadleaf trees, ferns, papayas, and bananas. The state of Chiapas seemed like another country. As the landscape became greener and wetter, the peasants became poorer and darker-skinned. Women with naked breasts walked on the shoulder carrying infants in cloth slings; old women washed clothes in streams; men carried *machetes* and wore pants, a shirt, and little else. Men whetted *machetes* on concrete curbs and smoked cigarettes. Farmers tilled fields with one or two oxen. In some places, the road deteriorated so much that Pearl had to get off and walk at detours while I forded streams or trundled over wooden plank bridges.

Pearl tapped my leg and reached forward to fingerspell, “Pee.” We

1984: Passion

rode slowly through one village after another, looking for a toilet. We rode past open sewers, litter, and hovels. Finally, we saw a café, so I pulled over. Pearl handed me her helmet and walked inside while I remained seated in the heat of the sun. I watched a dog dodging traffic with a skill that seemed to come from generations of third-world natural selection, as if there were a gene for jaywalking.

Pearl, flustered and angry, emerged from the café. A woman's head peered out the door behind her. Then a man's head poked out above it, followed by a child's head, which pushed through below it. Three heads, one above the other like a totem pole, stared at Pearl as she walked back to me. "Stupid people! I looked for a *baño* sign. Nothing, so I went like this." Pearl squatted and pointed to her crotch. "They stared at me, so then I did this." She pointed to her buttocks and bent forward. "They stared at me *more*. So I went like this." Pearl pantomimed pulling down her pants. "If they can't understand *that*, then they are idiots. I must pee now!" I laughed at the faces in the doorway, but Pearl had no patience with hearing people who saw her as an amateur Marcel Marceau.

Our evaporating sweat provided a moment's relief from the heat as we rode to the gas station at the end of town. While I refueled, Pearl went to the toilet behind a cinder-block fence. She ran back to the bike shuddering and retching. "The worst! Go see the toilet! I will have nightmares tonight!" Pearl sobbed. Pearl guarded the bike while I went to have a look. The toilet bowl was filled to the brim with yellow worms squirming in stinking brown feces, like a hallucination from an LSD trip. It was difficult not to retch. I peed on the ground behind the building and ran back to the bike. "Where did you pee?" I signed.

"I stood on that seat! In Mexico, I am going to stop drinking coffee."

Lighter traffic in the south made riding easier, and every night we talked about the sights we had seen.

Four days later, we arrived in Tapachula on the Guatemala border. While we ate dinner in the hotel's café, the wireless motorcycle alarm sounded, so I went to investigate.

"A man was wiping the motorcycle with a rag. He wanted to earn some money, but he triggered the alarm. I told him to stop."

"He was testing the motorcycle alarm."

1984: Passion

“That is impossible, because he didn’t know it *had* an alarm system.”

“Then he was testing to see *if* it had an alarm system. Right?”

The morning was lost buying visas at the consulate and changing travelers’ checks into *quetzales*. We arrived at the frontier, where we were issued pink cards and told to return when all four squares had been stamped. We parked at Immigration, showed our passports, got our card stamped, and moved on to Customs. We parked, opened our panniers, got another stamp, and moved on to Fumigation. A man in overalls carrying a sprayer like a flame-thrower approached us.

“He looks like a ghostbuster,” Pearl signed.

“I do *not* want the motorcycle sprayed.” I gave a dollar to him, and he stamped our cards without any spraying. We moved on to Police, got our final stamp, and rode into Guatemala.

Guatemala was exquisite—green, mountainous, and misty. The shoulder of the highway often had parades of indigenous peasants wearing brightly colored *serapes*. We turned away from the coast highway into the cool hills and continued to Quetzaltenango, elevation 2,300 meters, where we stayed in the Pension Bonifaz.

“I see you are not nervous anymore.”

Pearl shook her head. “It is peaceful here. Now we need to invent a sign for Guatemala without ‘nervous’ in it.”

“Police states are safe for tourists, but locals get killed when they don’t pay the bribes. The highway is good, paid for by Americans to keep the locals happy so they don’t join the rebels. Here, your black hair and brown eyes make you look Spanish.”

“When are you going to take photos? I want to show my friends.”

“I already have a thousand photos I never look at. You can’t capture life with a camera—when the film is developed, life isn’t there.”

“When did you stop taking photos?”

I thought a moment. “After Eugénie left me.”

“You don’t take photos because you think I will leave someday. Show me how to use your camera. Mine was stolen from my car.”

“A Minox is not automatic. It is difficult to use.”

“Eugénie used it on the nude beach.”

1984: Passion

“Eugénie read the instruction manual.”

We walked around the cobblestoned streets, where I took a photo for Pearl. In the market, I bought machetes in carved leather scabbards for my brother and me. We ate dinner on starched white linen in the hotel’s dining room, our most elegant meal of the trip.

“Order anything you want,” I signed.

“I can’t read Spanish, so I’ll point to the most expensive item.”

It rained in the morning, chilly yet bright. We put on all our clothing and raingear and, while the rain grew heavier, rode to Lake Atitlan high in the caldera of a volcano. The winding road stopped at a crumpled mass of girders lying in a river. The bridge wreckage was guarded by soldiers. A checkpoint preceded the detour. We dismounted, retrieved our passports from under our raingear, and handed them to the officer. He returned them and said, in perfect English, “You may proceed.”

We rode down a gravel track to the rocky riverbank. Pearl dismounted and forded the river, balancing with outstretched arms like a tightrope walker as the water poured into her boots. On the other side, she sat on a rock, pulled off her boots, and poured out the water. I forded the riverbed cautiously. Vapor hissed from the engine as water splashed onto it. At mid-stream, the mufflers submerged and gurgles replaced the exhaust beat. When I reached Pearl, I remained seated with my feet on the ground, panting, surprised I had not crashed and wrecked the bike. I raced the engine to dry it.

Pearl wrung streams of water from her socks. “What happened to the bridge?”

“The rebels blew it up. We are lucky this is summer; in spring, the river would be higher. A photo of the wrecked bridge with you and these soldiers would be wonderful, but I don’t want to be arrested.”

“Why does the army guard the bridge *after* it’s gone?”

“Maybe they *were* guarding it, but the rebels blew them up, too.”

We continued to Lake Atitlan, shivering in the drizzle, and stopped at the viewpoint. “Here we turn around. This is one of the most famous views in the world, but all we can see today is fog.”

“No photo?”

1984: Passion

“Of what—clouds?”

I regret not having taken more photos, but we were living in the moment; to have taken out a camera would have cast the shadow of the future over us. I could not explain my feeling of foreboding to Pearl.

We descended to Huehuetenango. In a motel, we peeled off our riding gear under the yellow light of a bare bulb dangling from the ceiling by its wires. We strung a clothesline in the room, hung our clothes to dry, and showered in cold water. The lights went out. Pearl lit the candles she found standing on tin can lids.

“My panties turned blue from the jeans’ dye. I felt like I was sitting on a wet diaper.”

“My toes turned brown from the boot dye. No heat means we will have to put on wet clothes tomorrow.”

We walked around the gloomy town in our rain gear. We soon returned and sat down in the motel café. A generator hummed outside.

I translated the menu for Pearl. “Red stew with gray sauce or gray stew with red sauce, and everything with tortillas. Did you notice we haven’t gone over any bridge in Guatemala? All of them were blown up.”

We returned to Mexico, riding long hours every day; we had *salud, dinero, y amor*, but never enough *tiempo*. In Campeche, the home of B. Traven, author of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the shadows of the mountains fooled me, and twilight fell before we could stop for the night. We had to ride at night, avoiding potholes, unlit carts and trucks, and children selling armadillos on the road. We came to a cinder-block building with small windows and a sign: *CUARTOS*, indicating available rooms, and we rode into an unpaved compound.

Dim light spilled out a door, along with laughter and tobacco smoke. Pearl guarded the bike against curious onlookers. I took off my helmet, walked inside the cantina, and, in Spanish, asked for a room. The proprietress led me to a windowless cell whose steel door opened directly into the cantina. The door and walls were painted blue. A fluorescent tube hung from a humming ballast transformer which hung by wires from the ceiling. The room had a metal bed, a thin mattress, a blanket, a sink with cold water dripping from a faucet, a shower pipe mounted on

the wall of the room, and a drain in the floor.

“Are there towels?”

“We have no towels.”

“Where can we park the motorcycle with good security?”

“Here, inside. We will watch it for you.”

The proprietress dragged chairs aside to clear a path. I removed the gear from the motorcycle and carried it into our room. Then, to the amusement of the patrons, Pearl and I pushed the BMW up a step and rolled it inside the cantina to our room door. We sat at a table by the filthy motorcycle, now the cantina’s grand centerpiece, and ate eggs, refried beans, and tortillas.

“The food is good, but the room stinks of piss,” Pearl signed.

“Maybe it was a prison cell. Then they moved the door lock from the outside to the inside.”

An old woman approached us. “*Buenas noches*. My family has lived here for three generations. Where are you from?” she said in Spanish.

“Ask about the bridge destroyers,” Pearl signed.

“*Las guerrillas*? Sometimes, they ask for a cow. If not, then this—.” The woman drew her thumb across her throat. “Guerrillas want food and money. Police want only money. We pay both sides, so we have no trouble.”

We washed under a trickle of water, dried using our dirty clothes, put on clean clothes, and slid under the blanket. The next day, we rode to Chetumal, near the Belize border, where we found a real motel.

The following morning, we arrived at the Belize border, cleared customs and immigration, and rode south on the Northern Highway, a dusty, washboarded crust of a road which was unsafe at any speed due to ruts, holes, and washouts. Anti-littering signs said *Beta no Litta!* in Creole.

The first town, Corozal, was somnolent, with no Latin American bustle. People waved at our big motorcycle going slowly past the unnecessary *Go Slow!* signs. In the town, I paused by a man walking along the road. “Is this the way to Orange Walk?”

“Da turn over dere, dot’s dee best way,” he replied with a grin.

We rode an hour to Orange Walk, a town of 6,000 yet the fourth

1984: Passion

largest in the country. Gangly, bearded men wearing black pants, suspenders, and white hats, with wives wearing dark dresses, black aprons, and black hats, drove horse-carts alongside the overloaded sugarcane trucks which lumbered through the town.

We rode south another hour and a half, passing shanties on stilts as we reached Belize City. I went inside the white, air-conditioned, colonial Bank of Nova Scotia building to change a traveler's check into Belize dollars while Pearl guarded the bike and slapped at mosquitoes. When I returned, she was surrounded by a crowd of onlookers of every color. She was terrified, still wearing her helmet.

"Wayoufrom?" shouted a man. "Dat be some *pretty* bike. Wants t' loan de bike t' ya' brotha'? Wants t' loan it t' ya' friend? *Ha ha!*"

I put on my helmet. I started the engine and slowly rode through the crowd. We rode several blocks before stopping at Moe's Café.

"Why did you leave me alone? You should have guarded the bike while *I* went into the bank, not left me outside by myself."

"Because only the person who bought the traveler's checks can cash them. I was terrified to ride through all those people. Let's eat."

Tasty turtle soup cheered us up. We bought a few trinkets in a tourist shop then rode around and looked for a place to stay. To our astonishment, there were no vacancies except in astonishingly expensive resorts. It took four hours to return to the Mexican border, where I bribed the immigration officers to let us return without visas. Pearl was impressed but seemed unnerved by how easily I did it. We returned to the hotel we had left in the morning, to the surprise of the receptionist.

In the morning, we rode to Akumal, on the Mayan Riviera, for our fondest memories of the trip. We snorkeled among iridescent fish beneath the blue lagoon at Xel-Há and rode to the Tulum pyramids on the sea. Pearl loved the resort. For two days, we rented scuba equipment and a Nikonos underwater camera and dived in the Caribbean, at the Mexican end of the Belize Barrier Reef. We weren't yet certified divers, but paperwork wasn't required in Mexico. The visibility was so good that at 20 meters we could see the bottom of the boat clearly. What a treat it was to jump from a boat into the water in T-shirts instead of

climbing from the shore over rocks in wetsuits. And, with no gloves, underwater conversation was easy—diving was an activity where most *hearies* were handicapped because they could not converse at all.

Pearl saw a shell under sediment on the seabed and picked it up.

“I didn’t see it. That shell is huge,” I signed.

“Hearies look, but they do not see.”

The divemaster took a flotation balloon from her vest, put the football-sized shell in its net, and filled the balloon with air. It went up like an elevator. Conservation had not yet come to Mexico, and the dive shops were stripping their diving sites bare. I handed the Nikons to the divemaster, who took our portrait. When we surfaced, the balloon was bobbing on the waves. The motorboat collected us and then the balloon.

“We get the meat and you get the shell,” said the divemaster. “If we don’t take him out, he’ll stink when he dies.”

“How do you get him out?” Pearl signed.

“We drill a small hole, put the shell in hot water, and push him out.”

The next morning, we retrieved the shell from the dive shop. Pearl was proud of her gorgeous conch. We carried her two-kilogram prize on the motorcycle to Mazatlán, from where she took it home on the plane.

Our morning happiness didn’t last. The highway soon became one construction site after another, where trucks and buses peppered us with gravel bullets. I ducked behind the bug-splattered windshield each time a truck passed, while Pearl pressed her face into my back. We slowed to avoid damage to the motorcycle and to ourselves.

Because of the construction delays, that evening we found ourselves doing the unthinkable: riding a Mexican highway at night, in the rain, and in crosswinds. Then, to add to the drama, the low-beam headlight burned out. I switched on the high-beam and tilted the headlight down. With the single beam, it was difficult to see the potholes, toads, turtles, roadkill, horse-drawn wagons, and unlit cars, but whenever I slowed down, the semi-trailers roared up behind us and careened past, spraying dirty water over our goggles and making it even harder to see. If I tilted the beam up so I could see farther, the oncoming drivers retaliated by switching on their high-beams, too, reducing our vision even more.

Pearl held on tightly. By sharing these adventures, we felt closer than

1984: Passion

ever before. We arrived in Mérida wet, filthy, and trembling from total fatigue. We stopped at the first hotel we could find.

At dawn, the wireless motorcycle alarm went off. I rushed downstairs and found children sitting on the motorcycle. They watched me as I replaced the headlight bulb with a spare from the toolkit.

Pearl and I walked around the city, dodging the shoeshine boys who wouldn't leave us in peace until we relented and parted with a few pesos; now, our tired boots looked almost new. In the market, Pearl bought a *serape* and I bought a handmade, felt-lined leather pistol holster.

We rode to the ruins of Chichén Itzá, then to the ruins of Palenque. After two more days of riding, we descended the mountains into Mexico City, in search of the deaf café the Playa Azul stranger had mentioned. I wanted to bypass the world's second-largest city (second only to Tokyo at that time) on a heavily-loaded motorcycle, but Pearl insisted we ride into it to look for the café even though we had no address or name for it.

It was a terrifying ride: the thick traffic of third-world cars was racing at 130 km/h, with every car trying to pass every other car. The smell of burning trash stung our eyes and noses as we sank into the brown haze of the city. We rode past hovels and crawled through smoky traffic in the sweltering heat, running red lights along with the traffic. As we stood in gridlocked traffic, we fended off street urchins who tried to sell us one lit cigarette or tried to wipe the windshield with a dirty rag.

We rode around Constitution Plaza and the National Palace for an hour, searching the side streets for the deaf café. We stopped at shops. We stopped at the tourist office. No one knew of a deaf café. Finally, I audaciously parked the BMW right in front of the Palace of Fine Arts.

"There is no deaf café."

Pearl knew I had done my best. "Thank you for trying."

"Do you want to see the Folklore Ballet? Right here. It is famous."

"Yes. I like to watch dancing because I can see the music."

We were lucky to get tickets for the next show. Pearl was floating on air when we emerged two hours later. "I never saw anything like that show. The costumes and the building are beautiful."

"This is where I met my pen-pal, a tourist from Madrid."

"You never saw her again?"

1984: Passion

“No. We write. She likes to correct my Spanish.”

A few days later, we reached Tepic, retrieved our cache, rode 300 km to Mazatlán, and repacked. At the airport, Pearl checked in and signed, “We did it.”

She flew home, hand-carrying her conch. I continued north, watching mirages float over the superheated asphalt. An hour later, I had a flat tire. We had been lucky; if the puncture had happened that morning, Pearl could have missed her flight. Sweat dripped from my forehead onto the tire as I repaired it.

A jetliner passed overhead, and I wondered what Pearl was thinking about her first motorcycle trip, her first trip to a non-English-speaking country, and her first trip with a hearing man. We had done it with no GPS, only paper maps; no cellphones, only phone booths; no ATMs, only traveler’s checks; no Internet, only the *People’s Guide to Mexico* and the *South American Handbook*.^{*} Pearl had been brave.

I spent four days riding 4,000 km home, passing through Tucson to buy tires and retrieve my cache. Virgil’s cocaine lasted until I reached the Canadian border. The 15,000 km ride had taken just over a month.

Oct: **Cocaine, My Life Is Fulfilled**

Pearl and I were a couple with a joint bank account. Condominium life settled into a sweet routine of short commutes, long evenings, self-improvement classes, restaurant dining, watching subtitled films, reading, and paying off the credit card balance which had ballooned during our long trip. Pearl’s conch was proudly displayed in our living room. We had our Palenque photo enlarged and framed.

We finished our open water diving course, but our instructor refused to certify Jeff and me because, unlike Pearl, we were not good swimmers.

^{*} In 1984, Mexico was still in the *South American Handbook*, In 1990, it moved into a new *Mexico and Central America Handbook*. In 1994, it joined the *North America Free Trade Agreement*. It moved from South to Central to North America in just four years.

1984: Passion

Then Virgil visited and, to our surprise, he solved that problem for us.

“So *this* is Pearl,” Virgil said, almost shouting as he came in the door in his Eddie Bauer jacket. “You’re as lovely as Derrick said you were.”

Pearl pointed to her ear.

“She’s deaf. I already told you that.”

Pearl smiled. “Derrick told me you are crazy.”

“No, worse,” Virgil laughed. “If I were crazy, that might explain the things I do.”

“Our motorcycle trip was my best. My ass got sore, but I didn’t get tired. It was always interesting.”

After Pearl made Red Zinger tea, Virgil took a tasseled leather pouch out of his pocket. He opened it, slid out a mirror, and handed it to Pearl, who thought it was a makeup kit and looked at herself in the mirror. Virgil pulled out a *guilloché* silver tube, a mesh screen, a razor blade, and a vial. Pearl arranged the paraphernalia in a row.

“What is this?”

“Cocaine. Have you tried it?”

“No. I smoked pot. I can try some for the experience.”

“Put the screen over the mirror. Tap a pinch of powder out of the vial onto the screen. Rub it through with the bottom of the vial.”

Virgil arranged the powder into six lines with the blade and slid the mirror across the table to Pearl, who slid it to me. I picked up the tube, snorted a line in each nostril, and slid it back to Pearl. Pearl copied my actions and snorted twice. Virgil snorted the other two lines.

“Better living through chemistry. Direct from Bogotá, uncut. You can’t get this retail.”

“Julian and I picked magic mushrooms,” I signed and said.

“I did LSD just after it became illegal, in 1968,” said Virgil.

“Did you try LSD?” signed Pearl, looking at me.

“Once, with Eugénie. Incredible, also for sex.”

“You shared many experiences with her.”

I changed the topic. “We didn’t have any problems on our trip other than a gas station that tried to charge me for more gas than the tank could hold, blown-up bridges, and a Mexican border bribe.”

“I’m mad at Derrick for not taking more pictures. Always rushing!

Never enough time.”

“Because not enough money to have more time.”

“Then I’ll arrange for you to buy half a kilo for \$20,000 the next time you ride south. I’ll sell it for \$35,000 and we’ll split the profit.”

My jaw dropped. “You’re kidding!”

Virgil grinned. “Yes, I’m kidding. I never mix money and friendship.”

“We did some diving at Akumal. We’re not certified, but they don’t care in Mexico. Our instructor refused to certify me because I can’t swim ten laps. That’s not a requirement, but he thinks he is the guardian of Atlantis. We finished his course but didn’t get certificates.”

“Then I’ll certify you. I need a few students every year to keep my instructor certification, so this helps us all. You give me the fee, and I’ll mail you the forms. You’ll get your certificates by mail. My name will be on them as a memento of the dives we never made.”

This was how Pearl and I came to be certified divers, with NAUI training but with PADI certificates. Pearl seemed intimidated by how easily I got things done.

We climbed into Virgil’s red Mercedes-Benz 280SL convertible and drove to a Thai restaurant, with the top down in the chilly autumn air.

“Derrick showed me photos of your property. Are you and your wife lonely?”

“Never! We cut our own wood and heat our own house. We dam our own creek and make our own power. We make our own mistakes, and we make a lot of love. Someday we will grow too old, so the time is now.”

“You don’t grow your own food,” I signed and said.

“I’m lazy, and the land is infertile. Snowslide is our playground. We have a river on one side, the forest on three sides, and the stars above.”

“Their summer solstice parties are wonderful. Live bluegrass music, grilled ‘poached’ venison—shot by poachers—and two dozen people drinking beer and smoking pot. Remote and private.”

“A thousand feet of wire rope keeps the taxman away. Property tax is God’s way of ensuring no one owns too much land. We got everything we need and nothing we don’t need—Derrick checked with his detector.” Virgil got up and went to the bathroom.

“What did he mean—‘you checked with your detector?’”

1984: Passion

“Virgil was becoming paranoid that the police had hidden a microphone in his house, so I made a radio detector to find out. Then He brought me to his friend’s place to check his house, too.”

“Why was his friend worried about the police?”

“Because he is a marijuana farmer.”

“You have some strange friends.”

“They make my world larger. I like to visit them, but sleep safely at home.”

Virgil returned. “If you want to live a country life, you’ll have to move while you’re young, or you’ll be stuck in the city for ever.”

“What about money?” Pearl signed. “How to live without a job?”

“Derrick works for a bank. If he borrows enough, the loan will be the bank’s problem, not his. How far can a bear walk into the forest?”

“Halfway,” signed Pearl. “I know that joke.”

“Yes, but how far is halfway? Just 20 miles! That’s the farthest you can live from a road in the USA. You two are lucky to live in Canada.”

Virgil passed the vial to Pearl under the table, and she went with it to the bathroom. When she returned, Virgil pointed at her nose. She wiped the white powder from her nostrils and wiggled her head with a smile.

While I huddled in the bus shelter in the autumn rain, wearing a suit and overcoat, a woman tapped my elbow. She offered me a wallet-sized card with a jade-colored plastic talisman hanging from a key chain. The manual alphabet was printed on the card.

“Are you deaf?” I signed.

“Yes,” she signed, surprised.

“Why are you selling this?”

“I have no job.”

“Where are you from?”

“Toronto.”

“How long have you been in Vancouver?”

“Three months. Why can you sign?”

“Because my girlfriend is deaf.”

When I came home, for a joke, I opened the door, turned the light off and on, and stood in the hall as we had done at Elizabeth’s. I heard a

1984: Passion

click as Pearl locked the door. I unlocked it and walked in.

Pearl was furious. "Why did you do that?"

"A joke, of course. Don't deafies make jokes?"

"Never do that again! How can I know if a man is hiding here? Put a viewer in your door. A chain is not enough."

"Sure. My joke was useful: you discovered my door has no viewer."

While we ate dinner, I told Pearl about my bus-stop conversation.

"She should not sell those sign-language cards. She is begging. It makes hearies look down on deafies. Vancouver deafies hate it when Toronto deafies come here and sell those cards. If we see her, we will take her cards away, but if a man is selling them, we will hurt him. If you see her, tell her what I said."

Again, Pearl had talked about violence toward men, but this time toward deaf men.

I gave Pearl the newspaper. "Read this. A man without arms wears his watch on his leg. He uses his feet to write, vacuum his house, and play the trombone."

Pearl read the article, slowly sliding her finger down the column.

"Of course he hates to be called handicapped. It's normal that people stare when he eats with his feet, but it is wrong to stare at ASL when deafies use a different language than English."

"He visits schools to teach kids not to stare at handicapped people. Do deafies visit schools to teach kids not to stare at ASL?"

"No, but *Sesame Street* sometimes shows ASL."

"Then write to the newspaper so hearies can hear a deaf story, too."

"Good, a challenge for me. Then you check my English."

That evening, Pearl wrote slowly and carefully, thinking about every word. She gave her draft to me. I only changed one word: *fullyfilled* to *fulfilled*. Her letter was published on 29 November 1984.

Editor, Vancouver Sun, Sir:

The Starers Have Real Problem

I have been deaf since I was born, so I read with great interest the article on your Sunday Kids Point page headlined 'Better Armed than People Think', which was devoted to letters from pupils at a

1984: Passion

Burnaby school who had been paid a visit by armless Alvin Law, who works for the Abilities Council.

One of the children who wrote pointed out that Law dislikes the words crippled, handicapped, and disabled. I agree with him that it is not he but the people who stare at him who have a problem.

During my childhood I thought normal people had no problem because they easily communicated with others. By the time I was 20 I realized that many of them had a problem worse than mine!

All of my life I have been able to use sign language to communicate with deafies, so to me it is the 'normal' people who keep staring at us who have the real problem.

I am no different from normal people except I don't use my ears and voice to communicate. I can speak words—they sound muddy, but they are clear enough, I think.

It is the people who stare at me when I use a pen and paper to write to them or when I speak slowly to them who obviously have a problem, not me. My life is fulfilled.

Pearl

Pearl and I visited Snowslide. Snowslide rekindled happy childhood memories, when she escaped the dormitory of the Alberta School for the Deaf and visited her uncle's ranch by the Rocky Mountains, about four hours away. Virgil and Rhea seemed to have the best of all worlds: education, savings, and a private life in a beautiful setting. We wanted a lifestyle like that for ourselves, but first we had to earn it.

Dec: Engaged, The End of the World

I was smitten by Pearl. I loved her and wanted nothing in return. Instead of saving money for the future, I bought her a diamond ring and invited her to A Kettle of Fish, the best seafood restaurant in town, to give it to her.

"Do you know why we're here?" I signed, after the waiter poured Canadian champagne. "Four reasons."

"Christmas?"

"That's one."

1984: Passion

“Birthday? This is my first birthday since we met.”

“That’s two.”

“To have dinner and talk about the year?” She blew a kiss. “Much has happened. Moving in, riding to Guatemala, diving lessons, signing, and so on. It has been a wonderful year. I love my feelings.”

“Yes, the third reason.”

“When my feelings are strong, I dream.”

“Dream about what?”

“A family, of course. I’m a woman. What do you dream about?”

“A house with land, of course. I’m a man.”

“A family needs a house, and a house needs a family.”

“I think so, too. I am happy your condo sold. That will stop your cash bleeding. But I can’t sell my condo. It’s worth less than its mortgage now, but it would be easy to rent. We might afford a house if we control money and if it is old or far away.”

“Yes. My condo was far away, so I read on the bus. No problem.”

“I calculated how much we can afford: about \$100,000.”

“Land is important for kids to grow up with a garden and animals.”

“Maybe our parents could help us with a down payment.”

“No. Mother refused to help when I bought my condo because her first down payment went to my husband when we divorced.”

“You are the sweetest and most interesting woman I ever met.”

“Also among hearing women?”

“Yes. I wonder what you would be today if you were hearing.”

“Maybe a doctor.”

“Yes. I love your mind and the rest, too. Do you think we are a pair?”

Pearl nodded. “We are living happily. I believe the man must be here, and the woman must be here.” She held both hands face down, one above the other, and moved them slowly in horizontal circles to show hierarchy. “This doesn’t work.” She held her hands at the same level and tapped them together to show conflict. “I want to be with you.”

I gave her a little black box. “Then you will need this.”

Pearl opened it. “A ring!” Her eyes were wide.

“Try it on.”

Pearl put the ring on her finger, past her chewed-off fingernails. “It

1984: Passion

fits. How did you know my size?”

“Because you tried on my engineer’s ring, the one I never wear.”

“Does this mean we are engaged?”

“Not yet, because I’m still married. But that’s what I want.”

“You are confused. I can see that. Are we engaged or not?”

“We are engaged to be married if you accept my proposal.”

“This is your fourth reason. When can you divorce?”

“After three years of separation, so in two more years. Or immediately, if either of us has proof of adultery. Eugénie wants a quick divorce, but she can’t get her lover to sign an adultery affidavit because his wife will find out he’s cheating.”

“If I give you proof of adultery, can you divorce Eugénie?”

“Yes.”

“I will support your divorce. *Pearl King* signs like this.” She signed my name sign but substituted “P” for “D.” “Did you know that when you say ‘King,’ your lips curl at the end and make you smile? I’m so happy, I want to shout, but I know I shouldn’t do that here. I want to live with you forever in a safe house with children and a garden and pets, not in an apartment or condominium with crime.” Pearl couldn’t stop smiling, beaming, even glowing.

“I want a hobby farm if we can afford it. Then we can enjoy the country lifestyle and make extra money. But now it is a dream.”

“If we dream together, our dreams will come true. If we make extra money, we can live on your salary after we have children. I hate the post office.”

“I hope we will find a place that we can afford that can help support us. But if we’re too far from the city, we’ll spend so much time commuting that we won’t be able to work the land.”

“We need an apartment in the city for working and a house in the country for living. We must stay together, always.” Pearl leaned her chin on her wrist and looked at the diamond and white gold on her finger. “Perfect.” She stood, walked around the table to me, and kissed me.

“I bought the diamond. Then a jeweler made the ring, by hand. I brought him to Cartier, I pointed to my favorite design, and he copied it for me. Some people think that because you are deaf, you must be poor,

1984: Passion

but they won't think so when you flash *that* in front of their noses.”

“Can you afford this?”

“Not really. I used all my savings. This is from my heart.”

Pearl signed Eugénie's divorce petition as my adulteress, clearing the way for us to marry without waiting for two more years. Pearl's letter below and my letter two years later, on page 189, accurately describe our lives in the beginning and the middle of our years together:

4 December 1984

Dear Grandpa and Grandma, how are you? I am fine and want to say Sorry for not writing you a letter. I know you need more letters to read to keep you busy. Then I am writing this long letter for you. To make you feel good to hear from me.

I need to practice writing more because I take English course. My marks are not really good but my tutor told me that I have improved. Derrick, my fiancé, teaches me more English.

I think Mom already told you about I have a boyfriend. By the way, Derrick is not deaf and very nice guy. He really loves adventures, outdoors, and works with papers at home. He never like watching on TV. He thinks TV is bad and waste the time and non-education, etc. Grandpa, Derrick has some experiences of gold-panning. I told him about you won a prize. I want Derrick to meet you one day. I think on Easter holidays.

Derrick knows many signs—to communicate with me and other deafies. Derrick has two sisters and one brother. His parents lives in Langley. Derrick, his two sisters and brother all graduated at University of British Columbia. Derrick has Electronic Engineering Degree. His brother is a doctor. His both sisters already graduated and then they are still studying more. One of sisters is in Montreal to study at University.

We are planning to buy a land where is out of the city. We want 'country' to live.

We want our two kids (in future) to have a good education. I will put them in private school—not public school. I don't want kids getting to suffer because I already had a experience. Well, I believe the kids should not live in the dorm.

At Derrick's job, he is Operations Manager and he now supervise 7 employees there. When I have enough money I will buy jade and

1984: Passion

pay carver to have business. I like to keep my job plus work at home (jade). Every night after our work, we keep busy taking courses. Derrick studies one course that is Management Business Admin. every Wednesday.

We already took course—scuba diving. We both passed the test. I was the last one who has low marks than others but I passed. Derrick was on “top.” Sometimes I was jealous of Derrick because he always has highest marks.

When I started learning scuba it was fun. I was awkward to dive down in first day. I tried to go down but my body kept floating. Others laughed at me. I was fun but I was little mad and can't go down. The next day, I bought a pair of ankle-weight and I went diving. It was perfect and no problem.

We went traveling to Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. I must tell you that Guatemala is the most beautiful country and we had many experiences there. I couldn't believe how beautiful it was under the water. We were traveling approx. 13,000 km around for 3 1/2 weeks. Belize is very awful country. We left and did not want to sleep there overnight.

In Mexico, there has very poor road that had many holes. Poor people sell many junk things but some of them sell very nice blankets. I really wanted to buy one blanket for you but no room in suitcases. In east of Mexico, we went scuba diving. We saw beautiful plants and fish under the water. I found four shells down there. One big shell is beautiful, I found on deep down.

Next year, I'll learn 'sailing'. Derrick has sailing certification.

I'll ask Derrick to call (phone) you. Please write to me soon.

Love, Pearl and Derrick

Pearl and I attended the Greater Vancouver Association of the Deaf's New Year's Eve party. The community hall parking lot was packed, mostly with older cars. Music pounded out of the building.

Before we got out of her car, Pearl signed, “Don't complain about the music. Deafies need to *feel* music to enjoy. Don't forget to look straight at a Deafie when he signs. You have a habit of wandering your eyes to glance at people that walk by, especially girls.”

A greeter took our tickets at the door and stamped our hands with a red stamp—*Urgent*, it said. The cinder-block hall was festooned with

1984: Passion

banners and balloons. The hall wasn't dark, for that would have made it hard to sign, but neither was it bright. A mirror ball spun over the dance floor, sending beams of light into our eyes. The floor was ringed by tables of animated partygoers who signed furiously, laughed, and sometimes shouted incoherently above the Robert Palmer disco music. Beer, wine, and soft drinks were passed around in plastic tumblers. But the dance floor was empty.

"I see a few hearing aids. Can you hear the music without yours?"

"I feel it through my feet and here." Pearl put her hand on her chest.

A rolled-up napkin bounced off my face. We turned to see a man sitting with a group of women at a table.

Pearl waved at them, "That is René. This is my fiancé, Derrick."

"Deafie or hearie?" signed René.

"Hearie," I signed.

I caught a look of disapproval on the faces of some men drinking at another table, who, of course, could read our signs anywhere in the room; Pearl was a potential mate lost to deaf men.

"Hold my purse." Pearl walked to René and began signing fast, native ASL, incomprehensible to me.

I bought wine for Pearl and stood at the side of the hall, drinking beer and surveying the young adults united by language and discrimination. I was an outsider, but until I spoke or signed, I looked like one of them. Conversations often took place among people several tables apart, so it was a challenge to see who was talking to whom. As the hall became crowded, people stood and rearranged themselves from time to time as their lines of sight were broken by partygoers. There were, no doubt, other hearies there, but I had no way of spotting hearies who were skilled in ASL, and as long as I was incommunicado there was no way hearies could spot me. This was the reverse of how Pearl lived in the hearing world.

I went back to the bar for more beer. A woman behind me stomped the floor to get my attention. She signed something to me in native ASL.

"Please sign more slowly."

"You are so tall that when I look up, I can see hairs inside your nose."

I laughed. She was an attractive woman with the maturity of a girl.

1984: Passion

“Thank you. You have wonderful eyes.”

She smiled at me.

After a speech in ASL from an emcee, a band played *Brown Sugar* by the Rolling Stones. Their live music was amplified even louder than the disco recordings, to the threshold of pain for hearing ears. Anyone who couldn't hear it could feel it. As soon as the live music began, the audience streamed from the tables onto the dance floor.

I waved to Pearl. She nodded. I made my way through the crowd to her and handed her purse to René. Pearl took the purse back and danced while holding it. She followed my lead well. As the band segued into the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" and the tempo slowed down, some dancers didn't slow down. I felt angry to see the musicians snickering at them.

“Jodi and Jeff are here,” Pearl signed. We sat down as a foursome, far from the speakers.

“No need to shout,” Jeff fingerspelled. “We can sign all night and not get sore throats. Not like hearing parties.”

“Plastic cups are good for feeling music,” signed Pearl.

“And ASL is perfect for discos,” I signed. “Where is Gavin?”

“At a family reunion. He told me you two got engaged—congratulations,” Jeff fingerspelled.

Compared to ASL, fingerspelling was slow, like watching a telegram spool out of a teleprinter. Pearl showed Jeff her engagement ring and hugged him. Jodi and Pearl switched to ASL, so Jeff and I switched to shouting at each other over the din, and we got sore throats after all.

“I wonder what that band thought when they were asked to play a gig at a deaf party,” I shouted. “They don't seem to be too happy here.”

“I hope they said, ‘We need practice,’” shouted Jeff. “You're a lucky man. Pearl will be loyal to you provided she knows you are loyal to her. You'll need to be sensitive to her culture. She's pure deafie! She's not like Jodi. Jodi complained to me that to be accepted by deafies, she tries not to show that she's advanced beyond elementary school reading.”

“Pearl's smarter, and she's gone to college. Her education means it's even harder for her to be accepted by ordinary deafies.”

“Only a bit harder—an academic double-standard is part of deaf

1984: Passion

culture. Have you watched Pearl read a recipe or an instruction book?”

I nodded. “She struggles to do it, not like a hearing college graduate. She’s told me about deaf culture, and I’ve read about it, too, but I still don’t see how there can be a ‘deaf culture’ any more than a ‘blind culture’ ... a subculture, maybe.”

“It exists because of ASL. It’s like an onion. In the core are deafies and people who have always been around deafies—their family is deaf, they went to deaf schools, they had deafie friends, they live in the deaf community. They see deafness as a language barrier. Out from the center, you get more communication with hearies until you get to the skin of the onion—friends of deaf people who don’t know how to sign. Just under the skin, you have the hard-of-hearing like Jodi.”

“Where’s Pearl in the onion?”

“Pearl is near the center, but she tries to move out. Look at her friends—all in the center except Jodi. Each onion layer tries to help the layer farther in, but the deeper you go, the more they believe that there are no layers and there is no problem.”

It struck me that Jeff and Pearl had been lovers, but neither had ever suggested they had been *in love*. Pearl would never have a child by an epileptic. Jeff’s interest in her was understandable, but it disappointed me to think she had taken him as her lover, even “a few times.”

The band played even louder. Jeff and I walked to a fire exit where a few other hearies had congregated as far from the loudspeakers as possible. We were all shouting at each other.

“By the end of the evening, all the hearies will be over here, trying not to go deaf, too,” shouted Jeff.

The band played *YMCA*. The audience held up arms, wiggled hands, shouted, and waved napkins in applause as the musicians took a bow. At last the recorded music resumed, a little less loudly.

“Are you planning to sell your condo and buy a house?” shouted Jeff.

“We’d like to move to a house in the country—a hobby farm, maybe—but we can’t afford it yet.”

“Let me help—I’m a real estate agent. The countryside is the right place. ‘Be prepared,’ as the Boy Scouts say.”

“I quit Wolf Cubs at seven; I hated it. Be prepared for what?”

“Teotwawki.”

“*Teotwawki?*”

“The End of the World As We Know It. I was starting to tell you about my plans at the rifle range. I’m convinced we’re coming to the end of the longest period of peace in history, and then we’ll have anarchy. We can only debate the timing and degree. Read *Life After Doomsday* if you don’t believe me. My drink has also come to an end.” Jeff bought a beer for me and two tumblers of wine for himself. He mimed a toast. “To *Toscana Bianco* in cardboard boxes, the cheapest way to get pissed. After three glasses, it starts to taste good.”

“Your anarchy views are extreme, Jeff, especially for a Canadian.”

“Hedging does no harm. I’m moving out of downtown as soon as I can. We are sitting ducks here.”

“For what?”

“Terrorism, social collapse, the Bomb. It’s a matter of time. Think—if you lived just 30 minutes from downtown, you’d be at the periphery of a one-megaton blast, out of range of third-degree burns. You’d get a half-minute warning between seeing the flash and being hit by the blast. That’s enough time to go down to your basement. That half-minute could save your life.”

“My parents’ house in Langley is 30 minutes away,” I shouted.

“But Langley’s east of Vancouver. The westerly winds will spread fallout *east*. Where to go? South, you’ve got the border and Seattle, a target city. West or north is where you two want to be. Look for a place on the lee side of a hill and with trees to filter fallout.” Jeff tossed an empty tumbler in the bin and started on the next one.

Jeff’s views intrigued me. His Cold War thoughts may seem fanatic today, but they were only eccentric at the time. *How to Prosper During the Coming Bad Years* (1979) and *Life After Doomsday* (1980) were best-sellers in the 1980s. Interest in survivalism had further increased after Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative was announced in 1983.

Pearl and Jodi approached us. “Why are you standing over here?” signed Pearl, with an annoyed, suspicious look; I realized that speaking at a deaf party was like having an encrypted conversation.

“We are here because it’s too loud where you are, there.”

1984: Passion

“Come back to the party. It’s midnight soon—time for the awards.”

While disco music continued to blare, the emcee presented awards in ASL. Volunteers passed out sparkling wine in plastic flute glasses. The music stopped while the emcee counted down the seconds to midnight in ASL. Then “Auld Lang Syne” thundered through the hall, bidding farewell to the old year as everyone hugged and danced.

“Can Jodi and I get rides home with you?” fingerspelled Jeff.

Pearl nodded.

“You’ve had a lot to drink,” I shouted and signed.

“And why not? I can’t have a car because I’m epileptic. My medication makes me a cheap drunk. I had only six glasses, and I’m already pissed.”

In the parking lot, a drunkard staggered toward us. “Hearies, *hub*?” He came closer and leered at Pearl. “With a deaf girl—will you teach him ASL? *Hub*?”

We scrambled into Pearl’s car. The man banged on my window and ran beside the car as we drove away, signing wildly as Jodi interpreted.

“Hearies make me angry because you think we don’t exist. You think all deafies can lipread? *No!* I hate it when you talk with your mouth like fools. *Fuck you* if you don’t learn ASL. Know what a TTY is? Know what message relay is? *Hub*? Hearies are the reason for no deaf jobs!”

Parts of the hearing world are rough, too, especially at a drinking party, but it seemed I would never be completely accepted by Pearl’s grievance-riven world no matter how well I signed. And Pearl could never be fully accepted by my world either, at least not with the technology of the day, simply because she could not speak or hear. I loved Pearl, but I wondered what world we could live in together, other than a world of our own making.

1985: Adventure

Jan: Leisure with a Quartz Watch

I answered my telephone in a nasal voice, my sinuses blocked by a cold.

“Is this Derrick King? This is the British Columbia Institute of Technology,” a female voice growled. “Your students have been sitting in the classroom for half an hour. Why aren’t you here?”

At first I was baffled, then I burst into laughter. Pearl looked up from reading *Silent News* and stared at me. “Because no one asked me to teach! It’s been two years since I’ve heard from BCIT.” I rolled my eyes as Pearl watched with curiosity. “How much are you paying?”

“We’re paying \$3,000 plus expenses. Tuesday and Thursday nights. 15 January until 26 March. That’s \$150 a night.”

“I’ll teach, but I can’t start tonight. Tell the students your administration screwed up and to go home.”

“Come early on Thursday. See me, and we’ll sort out the details.”

“See you then.” I hung up. “Wonderful news,” I signed. I explained the background and added, “Because this will be my second time teaching International Trade Finance, I already have all my notes, so it won’t be nearly as much work. We’ll have \$3,000 for a down payment!”

I brought home an armful of newspapers and real estate magazines. I unrolled a topographic map of the Vancouver area on the kitchen table and signed, “Let’s find a place to live.”

Pearl put her finger on the map. “We are *here*.”

I nodded. I drew a line along the USA border. “We can’t go south.”

“Right. What about the east. How far?”

“I don’t want to travel for more than an hour to work. One hour gets us out 50 kilometers—maximum. Traffic always gets worse.” I used a compass to draw an arc 50 kilometers to the east on the map.

“That’s New Westminster. I’ll never live there again.”

“Let’s look west. It’s better to the west because the wind blows east.

1985: Adventure

Jeff and I were talking about that. The western limit is the sea.” I drew a line along the shoreline.

“What about the north?”

“North is the mountains. The limit is the altitude.” I put a finger on a contour line. “The highest road is at 700 meters, so that’s our limit.” I traced the line to the north, joining the arc, the US border, and the shoreline to enclose an irregular area around Vancouver.

Pearl stared at the lines on the map. “Everywhere is city, close to Vancouver. Living in the country and working in the city is impossible.”

“I think we should have bought some land a hundred years ago.”

We browsed real estate advertisements while we ate dinner.

“We’re already over 30 and can’t afford anything nice.” Pearl slid the *Buy and Sell Press* across to me. “Look! Four-hectare and eight-hectare lots. Cheap. Where is Bowen Island?”

We looked at the map. Bowen Island, ten kilometers long with three paved roads, stood just outside the shoreline I had drawn.

“Perhaps our western limit should be the distance we can travel on a *boat* in an hour.” I telephoned BC Ferries to find out about ferries to nearby islands. “Bowen is the only commutable island. There are ferries every two hours. They take 20 minutes to reach West Vancouver. They have a bus connection that takes 40 minutes to downtown.”

“This is interesting. Let’s see those lots.”

I telephoned the vendor. “The vendor gave me the directions. The owner won’t come because he doesn’t live on the island. But one of my customers lives there; our bank holds his mortgage. I’m sure he’ll show us around.” I called Rokus. “He said to bring a bottle of Moselle and our boots on Sunday. We’re invited for a tour and dinner!”

I stopped the car at the Bowen Island ferry tollbooth in Horseshoe Bay.

“Ask for a discount,” signed Pearl.

“How much is the handicapped discount?”

“Fifty percent, but she needs to buy concession tickets on weekdays,” said the woman in the tollbooth.

Pearl smiled. “Sometimes it is good to be handicapped.”

Pearl also felt free to park in handicapped parking spaces when no

1985: Adventure

other spaces were available, but I felt uncomfortable whenever she did it.

I paid the fare and parked in the lineup. When the Howe Sound Queen arrived, we drove onto its deck and forward to the chain gate stretched across its bow. We climbed out and leaned against the ship's rail. After the other cars boarded, the ferry juddered into beautiful Howe Sound, leaving a wake of parallel white lines on deep green velvet sea ringed by snow-capped peaks. We shivered as the sweet winter air blew through our clothes, then climbed back inside the car, content to view the stunning scenery from our metal box through its windows. As the ferry approached the Snug Cove dock, green foam spumed as the forward propellers rocked the Queen into the creosoted slip. The ferry groaned against the pilings as we came to a stop. We drove off to the smell of salt air and seaweed and passed geese grazing on the shoulder under arbutus and western red cedar trees.

We drove uphill past the Snuggler Inn, General Store, Bow Mart, Chevron gas station, and a few craft shops and turned at the intersection. The pavement gave way to gravel. Ten minutes later, we passed through an open wooden gate. A dog ran after the car. We drove along the muddy driveway next to the shoulder-high, chain-link fence surrounding a vegetable garden. On the other side of the garden, ducks paddled in a pond. We drove slowly past a shed, a greenhouse, and a rabbit hutch and halted in front of a double-wide Knight mobile home. A propane tank as large as a man stood next to the hitch. Blue smoke drifted out of the steel chimney poking out the end of the trailer, bent at a right angle to the sky.

A couple walked out onto a wooden deck and welcomed us. We removed our hiking boots and gaiters and sat around the woodstove, bathed in the aroma of wood smoke. A young boy and a girl, curled up in the corner, watched our signing.

“Rokus and Jenny, it’s good to see you again and to introduce you to Pearl. So *this* is the bank’s collateral! How do you like living here?”

“We don’t want to live anywhere else,” Rokus said. “Bowen Island is suburbanizing, but the ferry and our dirt road keep out the riffraff. We have no TV. We love nature, privacy, friends, and doing things ourselves. We’re do-it-yourselfers with a freezer and microwave. We’re

not homesteaders who eat fresh meat in autumn, salt meat in winter, and beans in spring.”

“Why do you have a kerosene lamp?” signed Pearl.

“For when the power goes out—*often*. No matter; the stove is the center of our home. A stove mimics the seasons—spring while the fire builds, summer during the burn, and autumn as the embers fade. Winter, too, if we haven’t put enough wood in the stove.”

“Pearl’s a country girl, but I’ve never lived outside of a city. We’d love to be partly self-sufficient, but we’ll still need our jobs.”

“Homesteading magazines make money by selling dreams. Your land is not going to save you money except on heat if you are strong enough to cut your own firewood.”

“It costs us more to raise rabbits and chickens than to buy them in the supermarket,” said Jenny. “We do it because it’s fun and they taste good. Nothing compares with the taste and color of free-range eggs.”

“There *are* ways to make money on a homestead, but not from farming. Crafts, trading, animal boarding, tax games. Did you know that the seed catalogs arrive in the mail in the spring along with the income tax returns?” said Rokus. “Hobby farmers deduct farm losses from their other income. They don’t make money, but they pay less tax.”

“Are you safe here?” signed Pearl.

“Yes, we don’t lock our doors,” said Jenny. “Even hitchhiking is safe. There’s no bus or taxi, so the first car to pass will usually give you a lift. We’re a community, a great place for kids. They grow up with mink, grouse, ravens, eagles, owls, herons, cormorants, and deer. Bowen Island has the highest per-capita child population in Canada.”

“Fifteen years ago, the population was 600. Now we have 2,000 in winter, 3,000 in summer,” said Rokus. “We’ve doctors, lawyers, butchers, bakers, and misfits and hippies. Unlike in town, nearly everyone who lives on Bowen Island is white. I don’t know why. Perhaps only whites hanker after their ancestors’ rural life. Fifteen years ago, you could put a cottage on ten acres for \$30,000. No more! No more cabins. No more trailers like this one. Now you have to build a real house. The housing rules have become strict. And now, few good acreages are for sale. The lots you want to see on Eagle Cliff are so bad that agents won’t

1985: Adventure

touch them. That's why you found them for sale by the owner in the free listings. Put on your mukluks, and I'll show you why."

Rokus led us to his Suzuki jeep. He lifted the hood and, while he dribbled a can of Valvoline oil into the engine, pointed at the power line along the side of his property. "Until two months ago, the Magees on the other side of the ridge had only kerosene, propane, and a gasoline generator for light and power. For *decades*—and just an hour from downtown! After I got my power, I offered to sell Magee a right-of-way. He turned me down, but the idea must have gotten under his skin because soon I could name my price as if they couldn't do without electricity any longer. Har-har. When their power was installed, it was as if they'd arrived in the 20th century overnight. *This* is Bowen Island, and one of the more creative ways to make money here. Har-har."

Pearl and I climbed into Rokus's jeep with the dog and rattled down the lane, spewing blue smoke. Rokus drove us to another gravel road and followed it for 20 minutes before he paused at a forested slope behind a weather-beaten sign *For Sale by Owner*.

"The four-hectare lot is a strip straight up the hill, 80 meters wide and maybe half a kilometer long. It's good for mountain goats and bighorn sheep ... but there aren't any on Bowen. Too steep for a road, too narrow for switchbacks. All you can do with this lot is build a house by the road and hope you don't get a landslide someday. Down here, it's dark and cold because the north end of the island doesn't get much sunshine. Let's hike up and see the view."

We tramped through salal and kinnikinnick up the steep slope, the dog following us. I held Pearl's hand to help her balance. When we reached the top, panting and out of breath, we looked back.

"There is no view," signed Pearl.

"Not yet, but if you built here, the cold would keep you cutting firewood. Then, after you'd cut down all your trees, you'd have a view!"

We drove to the eight-hectare lot. The gravel road led to muddy tire tracks pressed into waist-high weeds. Rokus shifted into four-wheel drive and splashed through brown puddles. He stopped as the tracks faded away and we could drive no farther.

"No sunlight except, perhaps, at noon on the solstice, like

1985: Adventure

Stonehenge. Do you see those cedars? They thrive in swamps, like mosquitoes. See the bracket fungus on the alders? It also loves swamps. You'd never be able to drive the damp out of a house here. You couldn't even *build* a house here—you couldn't get a building permit because there is no road. The same with power, unless you want to pay for a mile of poles. No permit means no mortgage, no insurance, and no legal occupancy. These lots you came to see are only good for speculators and money-launderers."

Pearl and I looked at each other in despair. "Do you know any other places?" I signed and said. "Are any lots like yours available?"

"There is a place at Hood Point with a tennis court and a helicopter pad. If that's beyond your means, I know another place, the Thaxter place. It's been on the market for years, down to \$100,000 or so. The price was double that, but the place is unfinished and hard to sell. It's on the other side of this hill."

We left the Suzuki on the trail and walked through the underbrush past fragrant hemlock and cedar trees and stumps the size of a car.

"All second-growth. Those stumps are corpses. Try to imagine the forest before it was cut down in the 19th century."

We continued up a hill. "You see the smoke down on the left? That's Ross's place. He helped to build the place you're about to see, and he's your nearest neighbor. He's a good carpenter."

We came to a clearing. In it stood the skeleton of a house—the foundation, frame, sheathing, and roof. Tattered plastic hung from window openings and flapped in the breeze. Pieces of lumber and roof shakes lay on the ground. The house was impressive, the location, ideal.

I stared at Pearl. "From here, it looks like one story, but it's two stories on the downhill side."

"There is a driveway down to the trunk road." Rokus pointed to a steel mushroom next to a clapboard outhouse. "That's the wellhead. Construction power was from that temporary pole. See that pile of scrap? The roof shakes were split from cedar trees logged on this property. Bowen Island is literally part of this house."

We walked through the house, our boots thundering on plywood. Piles of manure and scraps of lumber lay scattered inside. A chipped and

1985: Adventure

dirty General Electric range stood in the corner.

“Boy Scouts put that stove there; they camped while the construction power was still on. The Thaxters inherited the land from Granddad, who inherited it from Great-granddad, one of the original settlers. They mortgaged their land to buy more machinery, but interest rates went sky high, killed construction, and wiped them out. It’s a few hectares. Fran lives on the other side of the road. Whoever buys this will need cash; I doubt if banks will take a mortgage on a shell like this.”

Pearl started at me. “This will be an *amazing* house in the future.”

Rokus led us past more construction debris and up the hill behind the house to a knoll. We gazed down at a barn and two horses standing in an unfenced field. The barn was decorated with moose antlers and antique logging and farm tools.

I felt like I was dreaming, and I’m sure Pearl did, too. “Only an hour from Vancouver, and look at *this*.”

We walked down to the barn. Pearl picked up a spent shotgun shell and pointed at a sign over the barn door: *DE MAL EN PIS*. “What does that say?”

“From bad to worse. It’s a curse.” The horses followed us as we walked into the barn, stepping over manure. Rokus opened the feed room door, took two flakes of hay from a bale on a pallet, and fed one to each horse. “With four stalls, concrete floor, hayloft, and feed and tack rooms, this has got to be one of the best barns on Bowen Island. And you can’t smell it from the house! Har-har.”

Pearl climbed the ladder. In a minute, she climbed down. “There is hay piled as high as me. But if there is no fence, why don’t the horses walk away?”

“Because they know this is their home. It’s a good thing the horses stay here because untrodden land becomes alder forest in no time. Before the field can be fenced, the barn will need running water. Otherwise, the horses won’t be able to drink.”

Rokus led us down a path winding through seven-story fir trees. A lake came into view, the water reflecting the trees swaying in the breeze like waving hands. Trout breached, sending circular waves to the blue herons standing on the shore waiting for their chance to strike. For the

1985: Adventure

third time that afternoon, Pearl and I stared at each other, dumbfounded, as if everything we saw was too good to be true.

Rokus scooped a handful of icy water into his mouth. “This is the reservoir for the cove. Swimming isn’t allowed, but we do it anyway. Horses aren’t allowed to piss in it either, but they do that, too. If it weren’t for the trees, you could see the lake from the house.”

Rokus led us to the ruins of a foundation. “This is where the homesteaders lived. They used stone because they thought they were building for ever.”

We continued around a hillock. Pearl saw the *For Sale* sign by the driveway and wrote down the telephone number of the agent.

“I know what you’re thinking. Write down the number on that pole—643. Rural lots don’t have addresses, so we use pole numbers.”

We could see that this was a project waiting to reward richly someone with health, money, love, and the time to enjoy them. We’d fallen in love with each other, and now we were falling in love with Bowen Island, too. We came to a steep paved driveway and began walking up. Halfway up, a deer fence sagged around a patch of weeds. Its hinges groaned as I pulled the gate open. We walked to the house, walked around and through it once more, hiked the soggy trail back to the jeep, and drove back to Rokus’s home.

Pearl played with the children while Jenny cooked rabbit casserole.

“If you join us on Bowen,” said Jenny, “you’ll love it because the happiest people here are the city converts. We know the grass is greener on *our* side of the hill.”

“Not exactly. The converts are the happiest because they have the cash to enjoy it,” said Rokus. “If you *start* here, then you can’t afford to *stay* here—it’s the country-city paradox. The buyer of the Thaxter property will need both cash and know-how.”

“It makes me happy to see that land by the lake. Your home is private and safe. Derrick and I have a lot to discuss when we go home.”

“We’re not in the Vancouver phone book because Bowen has its own little book,” said Jenny. “It’s like having a private, unlisted number. All calls to town are toll calls, but you can make your town calls from work.”

“Deafies get half price on toll calls, but that’s because it takes us twice

1985: Adventure

as long as hearies to talk by TTY.”

“Watch the time. If you don’t catch the nine o’clock ferry, you’ll have to sleep here in sleeping bags. There’s another country paradox for you—the islander with his ferry schedule. Leisure with a quartz watch! Har-har.” Rokus used a flashlight to show us the way to our car.

Because the sky was clear and there was little light pollution from Vancouver, thousands of stars sparkled. I’d grown up in the city, but Pearl had grown up in the prairies under a night sky like this. To me, the island night sky was stunning, but to Pearl, it was like going home.

I called the Bowen Island real estate agent who had listed the property. “The price is \$120,000,” I signed after I hung up.

“Can we afford it?”

“No. But do you want to see it again? We have nothing to lose.”

Pearl grinned. “Why not?”

Neither of us could stop thinking about that house and land. A week later, the agent, Luisa, met us in Horseshoe Bay. While we sat in her car during the ferry crossing, she showed us blueprints of the house plan.

“The house is designed in two wings around a harvest kitchen. The master bedroom, library, and living room are in one wing. Two more bedrooms and the family room are in the other wing.”

“This bathtub will be wonderful for babies,” signed Pearl.

“That’s a hot tub.”

“Fancy.”

“Yeah, too fancy,” said Luisa. “Thaxter ran out of money.”

As we drove off the ferry, Luisa pointed to the sign: *Caution: Camp for the Blind Nearby. Pedestrians May Be Blind.* “You won’t be the only handicapped lady on this island,” she chuckled.

We parked at the side of the trunk road in front of the barbed wire gate. Luisa got out, unhooked three taut wires from bent nails, got in, drove past the gate, got out, re-hooked the wires, and climbed back in.

“Damned, rusty barbed wire—lucky I didn’t rip my clothes again.”

“Uncle said always to leave a gate the way you find it.”

“Right, girl, else Thaxter’s horses will be on the road in no time. See the gravel going up into the trees on the right? The driveway is a circle.

1985: Adventure

Only half is paved, so when it's icy, you can drive up the gravel half."

We paused at the garden. "The septic field's under there," she said.

"So that's why they finished the garden before the house," I signed and said.

"Yes. To get a building permit, they first needed to 'prove the septic.' All the permits have expired, but you can get new ones. For the septic permit, you dig a hole in the garden, pour in a bucket of water, and time it percolating down. Then ignore your result, and write the legal requirement on the form. The soil is rocky here, so everybody cheats. Damn driveway! The car almost rolled backward into the field!" The car lurched as Luisa struggled with the throttle and clutch. We parked at the house. Luisa led me around the forest of spruce studs in the house while Pearl walked up to the barn to visit the horses and, perhaps, to spare me the work of interpreting.

"Thaxter started out first-class. The walls are 50 percent thicker than code, and the shakes are triple-thick. Then they went cheap. The sheathing is quarter-inch and thinner than code—illegal, in fact."

"How much would it cost to make this place barely livable so we could move here and finish the rest ourselves as our money allowed?"

"Maybe 40 grand. Get a quote from Edmund and see. Or I can rent you a cottage in the cove while you work on it yourself."

Pearl returned. "Come, look at this." Luisa and I followed her down the gravel half of the driveway to a pair of hemlock and alder trees that spiraled around each other like a four-story DNA helix. "The love trees." Pearl gave me a hug.

"You get forest and a lake, too. Well, the lake ain't yours, but it might as well be. It's protected for the water supply. Put in an offer or not?"

"We need to think," I signed and said. I walked back up the driveway to the outhouse near the house. It had been made from scraps of building materials and had no door. I pulled the lid off the Maxwell House coffee tin inside it and found a roll of toilet paper inside. I used the outhouse as I viewed the forest, listened to the creek babbling along the foot of the property, and heard the distant whistle of the Royal Hudson steam train on its tourist route to Squamish on the mainland.

"I'm not sure we can afford it," I signed and said when I returned. "I

1985: Adventure

don't think we can afford both to buy it and to finish it.”

Luisa looked annoyed. “The price started at one-eighty two years ago, then one-fifty a year ago, now one-twenty. The bank wants to dump it. Get another appraisal to try to pull the price down some more. Call Chang's Appraisers. Tell them you want the lowest possible valuation.”

“Whose side are you on, the seller's or ours?”

“Agents are paid by the seller, but we really work for the buyer.”

I went to government offices to copy the blueprints submitted with the original permit applications. Pearl and I pored over them and made a budget.

“Does it add up? Can we afford it?”

“Barely, with both salaries, my night-school pay, a first mortgage, a second mortgage, a personal loan, and a loan from my father. But \$120,000 is the most we can pay, including construction.”

Because the price had crashed and builders had little work in 1985, we *could* afford to buy and finish it—as long as we didn't make mistakes.

Pearl grew excited. “What if we rent the barn? Grow food? Have a business? I can sell my uncle's jades. I could get a loan from the bank. I have a good credit rating from paying my condo mortgage.”

“That's the personal loan I already counted.”

“Deafies get a 75 percent handicapped discount on property tax.” Pearl didn't like being labeled “handicapped,” but she always accepted the subsidies available to those with that label.

“That will help a lot, so we should put your name on the documents.”

“What if we move there and finish the house ourselves?”

“We can't live in a house without a permit. A permit follows inspection. The inspection follows water, lights, toilets, and septic. We could never build a house there and work downtown at the same time.”

“Then what if we pay to finish part the house before we move in and, after we move in, finish the rest ourselves?”

I drew a line down the middle of the plan. “The kitchen, family room, two bedrooms, and laundry room on this side are all we need. I'll call the appraiser. Then we need construction quotes for half a house.”

“Soon we will have a beautiful home with a big garden and horses and farm and dogs and children on Bowen Island.”

1985: Adventure

While waiting for the appraiser to do his work, I added a few more lines to our topographic map and showed it to Pearl.

“This is where the house is. My red line marks the elevation of the house on the mountains around it. The house is lower than the mountains except at the ends of the valley. It will be sunny in summer but not in winter. TV reception will be poor.”

“Closed captions need a good signal. Otherwise, the words are wrong and annoying. How many channels?”

“Two or three channels. But there will be protection behind Mount Apodaca in case Vancouver is ever bombed. The mountain shields the valley, and the wind blows Vancouver air away from Bowen Island.”

“Jeff worried about war and bombs, too. Don’t worry so much. If you just say it the way it is, then you’ll always be right. I will explain my philosophy to you when you are ready.”

Chang’s appraisal was an almost-affordable \$92,000. I made appointments with two contractors.

I drove to Bowen Island. After I reached the house, Ross wandered up the trail from his house next door. I gave him a set of the original house plans, and we walked around the house, upstairs, downstairs, inside, and outside.

“About \$50,000 without sundecks,” said Ross, lighting a cigarette.

“We can’t afford it.” I gave him our sketch of half a house. “What do you think of this? You wall off and finish half of it, so I can finish the rest myself. But no paint and no carpet for now.”

“Sorry, I don’t do half-jobs. I do it right or not at all.”

“I’ve heard good things about your work, but we can only afford \$30,000 now. What can you do for that?”

“You’d be living in a construction site, but you’d have plenty of company; a lot of people on Bowen Island live in unfinished houses. I haven’t much on, to tell you the truth. Business has never been so slow. Let me think about what I can do. I’ll get back to you next week.”

“Great. Thanks, Ross.”

“I know your place. Your well goes down 85 meters through solid rock. I watched it being drilled. At least you got no problem with water.”

“How do you know that?”

1985: Adventure

“My well can’t fill my pool without running dry. A couple of years ago, when your construction power was still on, I ran a 250-meter hose from your pump and ran it for a week to fill my pool. It never ran dry.”

After Ross left, I walked about the site, imagining our future and wondering if we would be able to afford it, so secluded and yet so close to a major city. I walked down to the lake again and drank from my hands. I hiked around the perimeter, looking in the underbrush for the surveyor’s iron posts marking the corners.

An hour later, Edmund arrived. I gave him a set of original plans, too. “Around \$70,000, basic—you can spend as much as you want,” he said.

“We only have \$30,000,” I gave him our sketch with the dividing wall. “Can you do this side, upstairs only, basic, for that?”

“Maybe I can—business is terrible! Let me get back to you.”

A week later, I received quotes from Ross for \$28,000 and Edmund for \$30,000 for half-finished houses. Pearl and I were overjoyed. We offered \$90,000 for the unfinished property in Pearl’s name.

While awaiting the outcome in the foreclosure court, I continued to work, teach, and study. During an MBA coffee break, I happened to mention our house activity to a classmate.

“Why don’t you ask Frank for advice?” he suggested. “He lives on Bowen. He’s an architect. He must know all the builders there.”

I was astonished. “I didn’t know Frank lived on Bowen Island!”

I was the youngest in the class. Frank was five or ten years older than me, well dressed, and of average height. He barely spoke in class, and we had rarely spoken to one another even though our class had just twenty students, nearly all of us company-sponsored executives.

I approached Frank for advice. “I heard you live on Bowen. I’m thinking of buying a house there.”

“You’ll love Bowen. I avoid leaving it except for work and school.”

“How do you attend school while living on the island? The last ferry sails before our class ends.”

“I stay with my parents on class nights. Everyone on Bowen has an in-town arrangement with friends. Then, in summer, all the friends come over to Bowen and we repay our accommodation debts.”

1985: Adventure

I told Frank about the house and showed him the plans and quotes in my briefcase. “Which of these quotes would you choose?”

“Edmund might do a better job, but your neighbor, Ross, won’t do anything poorly.”

A week later, Frank approached me after class. “I walked around the Thaxter place on the weekend. I might be able to help you.”

I was suspicious he had visited the property. “What sort of help?”

“Hire me. I’ve finished two houses on Bowen, and I’m finishing off the house we live in. My son and I can do your work more cheaply than Ross or Edmund. I can deduct the cost of materials for my house from my taxable income provided that you choose the same materials that I use in my house. I’ll give you an unbeatable offer.”

“How can you build my house while you work, study, and build your own house?”

“My son will work full time. I’ll work weekends and take two weeks’ vacation. My house can wait. Come to my place this weekend with your wife, and see it for yourself. You’ll like the materials we use. In the meantime, give me copies of the plans and quotes.”

I did so. A week later, Frank handed me his quotation, for \$24,000.

Pearl and I traveled to Bowen Island to visit Frank and his family in their three-story cedar house. The upper floors were finished and appeared to be of high quality. After the tour, Frank’s wife showed Pearl her Italian antiques while I discussed insulation with Frank in his study, looking out his window at piles of lumber and gravel.

On our way home, we drove past Frank’s previous houses. Then we discussed Frank’s quotations while sitting on the ferry on the way home.

“Frank’s house was beautiful,” signed Pearl. “But not yet finished.”

“Frank gave me advice and was helpful. But I found out that he isn’t a registered architect even though he said he works as one. He dropped out of university before graduating. He said he had to work.”

“Maybe he dropped out because he failed or had a love child. Maybe he told you because he thought you would call the association to check.”

“He only admitted it when I didn’t see a degree on his wall, only some certificates. But he told everyone in class he is an architect.”

“Frank’s wife is sweet. We talked about kids and cooking. She works

1985: Adventure

part-time at the bank in West Vancouver. But Frank—I don't know. Most hearies move their hands when they talk to other hearies, but Frank doesn't do that."

"If Frank can build us a house that looks like his own house for \$4,000 less than Ross, then we should take it. Even if he makes some mistakes, it will still be cheaper. We have no spare cash."

"How can you be sure Frank will do a good job?"

"He's lived there for years, so he can't afford a bad reputation."

"Ross and Edmund live on the island too. They can't afford a bad reputation because they don't have another job. Frank has another job. He knows what he is doing, but we don't know what he is doing. But you decide. You know more than I do about houses."

We accepted his offer. Frank's dishonesty about his formal qualifications meant we should have declined his offer, but all I thought about was saving money. I took a day off to apply for the septic permit in Squamish, the building permit in Vancouver, and the electrical permit in Burnaby. It took one day to get three permits because the departments handling unincorporated Bowen Island were 150 km apart. Nothing on Bowen happened quickly, and that was part of its charm.

Eugénie and I attended divorce court. A no-fault divorce would have taken two more years, so I pleaded guilty, and Pearl and I were recorded as the adulterers to protect Eugénie's lover. The judge complimented us on our preparation and said he wished other couples were as cooperative. We had lunch in the courthouse café as singles, ten years after we first met. Our divorce was one year before the 1968 Divorce Act was amended in 1986 so that only one year of separation was needed; Eugénie and I had just missed the new rules.

Luisa called me two weeks later, hysterical. "Fran called me! She's come up with the money to call off the foreclosure! Our work is for *nothing!*" Luisa sobbed. "The Thaxter property is *jinxed!*"

I attended foreclosure court the next day, as an observer. Thaxter didn't appear, so on 27 February 1985 the house was sold to Pearl and me, with Pearl's name on the title. Pearl and I were thrilled. Life was going our way! My old life with Eugénie lay behind me, and my new life

with Pearl lay ahead. We would find happiness together in the new life we were building. This was high adventure, and we were on a roll.

Mar: The Benefits We Discussed

I called Frank and told him the news. He drafted a contract and gave two unsigned copies to me in class. The contract specified completion in two months.

“Why is the contract with Astra Trading Company Limited and why does it have a Vancouver post office box for its address?”

“For taxes, of course, to get the benefits we discussed. I use a post office box for my mailing address because I don’t want the Bowen Island postmistress reading my mail in her spare time.”

Pearl and I discussed Frank’s contract, and we signed it. Frank ordered materials and began work a few days later. He called me to tell me that the horses were already gone.

A semi-trailer load of drywall and materials soon arrived. Frank, his son, and his son’s girlfriend started work. Day after day, they wired and plumbed; erected windows, siding, vapor barrier, and insulation; installed and buried the septic tank and connected it to the septic field; and cut, nailed, and plastered drywall. The power company connected electricity to the temporary pole left by the Thaxters, the telephone company hung a line from the road, and a mason built a chimney.

I advertised my condo for rent. Pearl traded her Buick Skyhawk in on a new blue Nissan pickup truck. We worked at our jobs downtown, restless, and looked forward to visiting Bowen Island each weekend.

“We need wills,” I signed. “We are unmarried, so if either of us dies, the other will have a mess. Do you know a signing lawyer?”

“There is one deaf lawyer in Vancouver,” signed Pearl.

“We should use him to make our wills so he can give you advice.”

“I don’t want to use him. Deafies gossip. I know a hearie lawyer, Quinn. He fingerspells and has many deafie customers.”

I was surprised that Pearl wouldn’t support a deaf lawyer, even for a simple will, because she had spoken about becoming an investment

1985: Adventure

analyst for the deaf community. Instead of the deaf lawyer, who was hard-of-hearing but could sign fluently, we had Quinn make our wills.

We bought a wheelbarrow, stepladder, crowbar, garden tools, kerosene lanterns, dungarees, gloves, and flashlights. We bought a used refrigerator and woodstove. We hauled everything in our new truck.

Pearl cleaned the old electric range with water from a hose Frank had connected to the wellhead. I connected it to the temporary power pole. Frank asked us not to remain in the house while he and his son were working to avoid getting in their way, so while they worked on the house, we cleared the property and barn to get the barn ready to rent.

We ate our meals at the Snuggler Inn, warming ourselves by the fireplace. Life was lived slowly at the Snuggler, as if coffee were sold by the hour, not by the cup. The linoleum floor was more faded by time than it was worn down by footsteps.

Pearl and I repaired the garden fence and gate. We cleared the barn of half a ton of manure and, like the greenhorns we were, raked the raw manure into the garden without composting it first. We collected and stacked the old construction material scattered about the property, grouping the flotsam into wire, lumber, non-flammables, which we stuffed into garbage bags, and flammables like wood and plastic, which we burned in the clearing in front of the house in bonfires.

When the chimney was finished, I installed the woodstove flue and called Bowen Island's fire chief for inspection: it passed. Pearl and I climbed onto the roof and spent hours cleaning rotting needles and leaves from the gutters and shakes. We stained the fascia on the one-story side of the house by standing on an aluminum stepladder. At night we locked our tools in the barn tack room, the only room on the property with a door. Frank took his tools home every night.

When the chimney was dry, I started the stove so that the new drywall could dry. We felt overjoyed to see smoke coming out of our chimney for the first time. We enjoyed our work. Our fatigue made us feel the progress in our bones as we built our future together.

Pearl discovered a plastic pipe poking up through the soil outside the barn. I probed around the wellhead and found the other end. I connected the pipe and put a tap in the barn so when Frank completed

1985: Adventure

the plumbing, the barn would have running water, ready for horses.

We were excited to have our own business. We advertised in the *Undercurrent*, the local tabloid:

Barn for Rent. Four stalls,
tack and feed rooms,
concrete floor. \$150.

“Frank is a week behind schedule,” I signed. “He works on our house during his vacation, and he has run out of vacation. Now he only works on weekends, but someone has to keep the fire burning to keep the walls drying. Frank says he can’t do it during the week anymore.”

“He must hurry up and finish. I can’t delay my vacation—union rules. If I can’t paint the walls in June, I will waste my vacation.”

“And we must move out of my condo before my tenant arrives at the end of May, two weeks before Frank now says he will finish.”

“Can we move into the house before Frank is finished?”

“He said no. Even his wife called to convince me not to move in at least until the drywall is sanded. She says white dust will be everywhere.”

“We can wait for two weeks in your parents’ place.”

“What about our stuff? Haul it east to Langley, then west to Bowen?”

“We can move our things to the unfinished west side while we stay with your parents, so we don’t have to move things twice.”

“There will be no one to watch our stuff. How about this: we move our stuff to the unfinished side. We camp in the partly-finished side for two weeks. During the day, we cover the bed with plastic. I’ll keep my suits in a suitcase. There is water from a hose and an outhouse. There are an electric range and a refrigerator, but we can eat at the Snuggler. We can shower at the YMCA and do laundry in town. If we move in on schedule and we check progress daily, it might push Frank to finish.”

“Elizabeth’s son, Kieran, is on school holidays. Maybe we can hire him to guard our things for two weeks while we stay with your parents.”

“Good idea! Boys like camping and need money. We can fill the refrigerator with food. Kieran can read, play, and feed the fire to keep the walls drying. He can call the police if there is a problem.”

Pearl talked to Elizabeth on the TTY. Then she talked to Kieran:

THIS IS A BIG ADVENTURE FOR YOU TO STAY ALONE YOU KEEP

1985: Adventure

THE FIRE AND TAKE YOUR FOODS FROM FRIG AND HEAT ON
ELECTRIC STOVE OUTSIDE CAN YOU DO THAT? GA

COOL GA

THERE IS NO TV YOU WILL BE BORED TELEPHONE IS LONG
DISTANCE TO HOME SHORT CALLS ONLY ARE YOU SURE TO STAY
ALONE FOR TWO WEEKS OR MORE? GA

I WANT TO DO IT IS BOW AND ARROW OK? GA

YES PERFECT WE WILL PICK YOU UP I WILL CALL YOUR MOM
TO ARRANGE SK

While we prepared to ship our goods, Pearl showed me a re-homing notice in the *Buy and Sell Press* for a two-year-old German Shepherd. The timing was perfect: he could keep Kieran company. We drove to Coquitlam to meet the backyard dog, Whisky. Pearl thought he was a fine dog, so we decided to adopt him. We arranged to pick him up on the day we brought Kieran and our goods to Bowen Island.

We stopped at a pet shop on the way home to buy supplies for Whisky. We left the shop with dog supplies, cat supplies—and a kitten.

“For the first time, I feel my life is going *my way*,” signed Pearl.

I could see our research, preparation, and teamwork paying rich dividends. In 30 years of city life, I had never owned an acreage or had a pet larger than a goldfish; now, the pieces seemed to be coming together.

Apr: Moving to Bowen Island

On moving day, two men from Bowen Freight came in their truck, loaded our goods, and left for Bowen Island. We put the kitten in our truck and went to collect Kieran and the dog.

When Whisky’s owner walked him to our truck, the dog was limping on three legs and a forepaw was wrapped in a bloodstained rag. The irresponsible owner thought nothing of it. At first, the dog made me nervous, but Pearl had no fear of a wounded German Shepherd that she had known for ten minutes. He barked for joy when we drove away, so loudly that Pearl stuck her finger in her right ear. We took Whisky straight to a veterinarian. After surgery, he lay down in the truck with a plastic cone on his head and fell asleep. We picked up Kieran, two hours

1985: Adventure

later than expected, and drove to Bowen.

Frank and his son were plastering when we arrived. The movers had finished unloading our cartons into the unfinished, unheated, unlit, and windowless west wing and were now unloading the bed, piano, kitchen table, and houseplants into the heated and dusty east wing construction site. Kieran walked the crippled dog. Pearl took care of the kitten and made the bed for Kieran, covering it with plastic. I hung our clothes inside plastic bags on a closet rod over the bare earth basement floor.

Rokus's Suzuki sputtered up the driveway. Whisky yanked the leash from Kieran's hand and chased the jeep, doing his best to be a guard dog while running on three legs with a cone on his head. Rokus and Jenny stepped out of their jeep and greeted us, so Whisky stopped barking and greeted them, too; we were fortunate Whisky could "read" people and situations well. They welcomed us to Bowen Island and presented us with a gift of a frozen rabbit. They walked around the house to see how things were going, wished us the best of luck, and left.

Kieran went into the house and came out with the kitten. Whisky liked the kitten, but the terrified kitten hissed at the dog. Pearl held the kitten while I drove Kieran and Whisky to the General Store. Whisky stood in the back of the truck.

The General Store had everything an islander needed, even videotape player rentals. Prices for most goods were not much higher than on the mainland. It had a meat-locker and a butcher who cut and wrapped sides of meat from the mainland and butchered carcasses for deer hunters and hobby farmers. It was a liquor agency, too, so, unlike the government liquor stores in Vancouver that sold warm beverages and nothing else, the General Store sold cold beer together with groceries.

"You can have anything you know how to cook. Frozen pizzas?"

"With cream sodas and Oreos?"

"Sure. And some mini-pack cereals with plastic spoons."

"Ice cream bars?"

"You bet. Wow! The ice cream is double the mainland price. They know that if we buy it on the mainland, it will melt on the ferry."

"*Choice!* Can I get more comics? And dog biscuits?"

"Sure. And don't forget some toilet paper."

1985: Adventure

The woman in front of us bought groceries without paying for them. The cashier wrote the amount in a black book, and the woman signed the entry. On the wall behind her was a list of defaulters. I opened an account so Kieran could walk to the store and get whatever he needed.

Back at the house, I taught Kieran how to tend the woodstove in the windowless cellar while Pearl held the flashlight.

“You can use the utility lamp tonight, but Frank’s using it right now. I asked him to let the stove run down today so I can show you how to light it. Use paper, cedar kindling, wood sticks, split wood, and then a whole round of wood, like this,” I said, as Kieran interpreted. “When you do it right, you only need one match.” I closed the stove, lit a match, and pushed it through the grate. Fire raced across the paper. In a few minutes, the flue pipe groaned as the stove came to life, then shuddered and thundered as flames danced out the grate with each heartbeat.

Pearl closed the damper slowly until the vibration stopped. “Uncle taught me this.”

I closed the grate to slow the burn. “One round at a time, and not too much air. Keep it burning day and night, but don’t let it get too hot. Check it hourly until you go to bed. Then turn it down a bit. In the morning, you should be able to add wood without starting over again.”

We tied Whisky to a tree and drove to the Snuggler for dinner.

“Tonight you will be the first to sleep alone in that house,” I signed and said. “Keep Whisky with you, enjoy your comics, buy more at the store if you want, and call us or Rokus or the police if you have a problem. The numbers are next to the phone. If you need supplies, you can walk to the store in half an hour.”

“Ten bucks a day! Whoo-hoo!”

“I want to have a boy like you, Kieran,” signed Pearl.

When we returned six days later, Kieran was sitting on a log next to Whisky and whittling. His jeans were streaked with white drywall dust.

“How was it?” signed Pearl.

“All right, I guess. No one came except Frank and his son, mostly his son. He told me to stay outside while he worked, so it was really boring. Except for the deer! I never saw one up close before!”

We walked inside. Half the drywall had been sanded. Dust was banked like snowdrifts.

“The kitten kept pooping in the houseplants. They stink. Whisky slept with me! I want to go home. Can I go home now?”

“All right. Whisky will guard now,” I signed and said.

“You have to tie him up outside. He barks and lunges when Frank and his son come near. He hates them!” Kieran held his finger to his lip. “Look out the window—Bambi’s back! I made friends with him after he walked past me while I was shitting. Hold Whisky and watch me.”

Kieran stepped out the door, pulled up a handful of weeds, and approached the deer. It ate from Kieran’s hand. I took a priceless photo of them and had it framed for him, but he would never see it because Pearl and Elizabeth soon parted ways, and Pearl refused to give it to her. I began to realize that Pearl’s relationships were unstable, and she didn’t care, or even notice, when others also suffered while she settled a score.

Frank and his son arrived and resumed sanding the drywall. Pearl took Whisky and drove Kieran home, a four-hour round trip. I drove to the Bowen Building Centre to rent a rototiller. The aroma of lumber and creosote there seemed to promise a good life ahead. Clerk Donna was a walking home-improvement encyclopedia; she gave me a lecture on Burndy connectors the first time I met her. She could order anything and have it there in a week. The rototiller made it easy to till the garden soil and to work our horse manure into it to prepare it for planting.

When Pearl returned, she and Whisky joined me in the garden. She was laughing. “I discovered why Kieran wanted to leave early. The cookies and sodas are gone—and the outhouse is full of diarrhea!”

Pearl and I pulled stones and weeds. Whisky became bored, so Pearl played fetch-the-stick. He soon started staggering like a drunkard, and then he collapsed. I thought he was choking, so I held him upside down by his hind legs, and Pearl squeezed his chest in a canine Heimlich maneuver. He was breathing, but he didn’t move. Pearl stroked him and called his name; it sounded like “*Eeh-ih.*”

“What was he chewing?”

Pearl showed me the stick she had been tossing to him.

“That’s foxglove. It’s poisonous!” I ran up the driveway, found some

1985: Adventure

charcoal in the bonfire ashes, ran back, and poked the lumps into Whisky's mouth. We dribbled in some water. Slowly he recovered. He probably would have recovered anyway, but I knew activated charcoal was a treatment. Pearl seemed daunted by how much I seemed to know.

We planted vegetable seeds until dusk. Frank and his son were still working. We tied Whisky to a tree and drove to the Snuggler in our gumboots and overalls, where we did our best to wash in its bathrooms before we ate dinner. When we emerged from the restaurant, the starry sky was magnificent, and when we drove back, we saw the glow of our house through the trees from the bottom of our driveway for the first time. To us, that view was of paradise. We were in love, we had our land, and we were building a rich and exciting future.

I went down to the basement to stoke the stove. Pearl followed me while Whisky cowered at the top of the stairs, terrified of fire. Our flashlight beams danced like white cones in the smoky air. Upstairs, we sat on dirty chairs in the glow of a utility lamp. It was our first night on Bowen Island.

Pearl pointed at a dead wire dangling from the ceiling. "It's hard to sign with a flashlight in one hand."

We took the utility lamp into the bedroom. I sprinkled Dustbane on the plywood floor and swept it. Pearl peeled back the plastic sheet covering the bed, pushed Whisky into the hallway, and closed the door. I took the pistol from the lockbox, loaded it, and tucked it under a corner of the mattress; there were no safe-storage gun laws in those days. We put our clothes in plastic bags and slid naked between the sheets.

I switched off the lamp. The moonbeam through the skylight fell on the bed like a spotlight. After we felt warm, we pulled back the blanket and began to make love in our house for the first time. Whisky grumbled outside our door, as he would do every time we made love. I jerked and pulled back.

Pearl pushed me off her and sat up. "What's wrong?"

"Water dripped on my back." I turned on the utility light and stood naked on top of the bed. "There is water on the metal skylight frame."

I covered the blanket with the plastic sheet and opened the door to let Whisky in. We slid under the blanket *and* the plastic sheet. Whisky

1985: Adventure

lay on the floor next to Pearl.

“Why does Whisky go to your side?”

“Animals prefer deafies to hearies. I told you before. Is it quiet here?”

“I hear the firewood burning and the refrigerator motor. Outside, the wind moves the leaves like this.” I rubbed her hands. “The wind blows life through the forest. The leaves whisper.”

“The trees must make a bigger sound than the leaves.”

“The trees don’t make sounds because the wind can’t move them.”

On our first night on Bowen, we made love while I listened to water dripping on the plastic sheet above my back, ticking like a time bomb.

At Sunday’s sunrise, Whisky’s barking jolted us awake. We sat up and saw two deer on the hill leading up to the barn. Whisky clawed at the window in his determination to run outside to them.

“One window is higher than the other. It looks strange,” signed Pearl.

“Yes, it does look strange. I will ask Frank to fix it.”

We dressed in our overalls and covered the bed with plastic.

After breakfast, Whisky barked furiously, so we knew someone was coming. Pearl could hear his barking anywhere in the house. Frank and his family had arrived, so we chained Whisky to a tree and left him with some water. Mrs. Schutt gave us a carrot cake as a housewarming gift. Frank showed her around the house, then he and his son put on masks and resumed sanding drywall while Pearl and I continued tidying up the property. We filled a dozen plastic bags with trash and carried them to the end of the driveway for collection.

We went to the Snuggler for dinner. When we returned, Frank and his son were gone. Fine white gypsum powder covered everything in the house, as if a blizzard had blown through it. We tried to vacuum it, but the dust was so fine it clogged the vacuum cleaner in minutes. We could only sweep with Dustbane and wet-mop by the glow of the utility lamp. The dust filled our hair and nostrils and made us as dirty as the house.

We took turns taking showers in the cool night air by standing naked on a plank behind the house while the other aimed the hose. The water system had not yet been installed, so the hose blasted cold water from the underground pump at firehose pressure, making our showers

1985: Adventure

effective and brief. Then, wearing only sandals, we ran naked to the basement by flashlight to warm ourselves before the radiant heat of the woodstove, like a sauna in reverse.

Monday morning, we dressed in the basement standing on a piece of plywood on the gravel floor. We drove to the cove, parked, and walked onto the Howe Sound Queen for our first commute, surrounded by 200 neighbors. Everyone seemed to be talking to someone else. I shaved in the ferry washroom and was surprised to find myself standing next to other men who were shaving.

We commuted by ferry and bus together, ate in the Snuggler together, and, during the week, showered at the YMCA. Because the vehicle fare was high, we drove the truck onto the ferry only once a week to buy groceries and building materials. We were becoming alarmed that progress had slowed to a crawl when so much work remained to be done.

“The outhouse is cold. When are we going to have a toilet, lights, and a bath? Frank is taking forever. My holiday starts next week! I have to paint,” signed Pearl.

“Frank said he would finish sanding next Sunday. Now he’s waiting for the electrical inspector. Then an electrician will connect the house and we will have power and hot and cold water.”

I used a scarce vacation day to meet the electrical inspector. Frank wasn’t licensed, so I had to attest that I, the homeowner, had done the wiring in order to make Frank’s work legal. I must have made a good impression on the inspector because he approved Frank’s wiring without entering the house and without looking at the wiring! The next day, an electrician moved the power line from the temporary pole to the house, so when Pearl and I came home from work, we had electricity in the sockets and a few ceiling lights for the first time. Even though the light fell on chaos, we were thrilled that civilization had reached our property.

On the weekend, Frank plumbed the wellhead to the house and switched on the water system. Pearl flushed the toilet and cheered. After two weeks of camping, we had hot running water and an indoor toilet.

While Frank and his son sanded drywall, I filled in the pipe trench which ran from the well to the house. While I was shoveling the earth

1985: Adventure

back into the trench, I discovered that Frank had spliced two pieces of pipe for our water main instead of using one, and his splice was leaking. When I bent down to examine it, Frank shouted at me to keep shoveling—to bury his defect under two feet of soil! Instead, I re-spliced the pipe with new clamps and made sure the leak had stopped before I buried it. This was our first sign that Frank didn't care about workmanship: it made no difference to him if our pump would be pumping water into the soil forever, driving up our power bills and burning out the pump prematurely. I explained my concern to Pearl.

When Frank left, we put on dust masks and swept and wet-mopped the fresh piles of drywall dust. At bedtime, I reached under the mattress, took the pistol, unloaded it, and handed it to Pearl.

“For self-defense. Do you remember how a rifle works?”

Pearl nodded and mimed pulling the bolt and taking a shot.

“A pistol is the same. It fires when it is loaded, the bolt is pulled, and the safety is off.” I loaded the gun and cocked it. I turned the safety lever on. “Now it's safe—try it.”

Pearl pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.

I turned the safety off. “The red dot means it will fire if you pull the trigger. Don't!” I turned the safety back on. “We will leave the safety on. Whisky is your alarm. The gun is your defense. If a stranger comes, lock the front door, come here in the bedroom, and close the door. Turn the safety off, stand in the corner, and wait. If a man walks into the bedroom, shoot him. Then call the police through the MRC.”

“Will I go to jail?” Pearl signed.

“No. When he's inside, not invited, and you fear assault, you may shoot him. Leo keeps a pistol under the mattress for his wife, too.”

Pearl hugged me. “You care for me and protect me. I love you.”

The power failed and the light went out. I took the flashlight from my pocket and used it to find and light the kerosene lamp in the kitchen. The W-shaped flame of the kerosene lamp cast a lovely island of yellow light. It flickered as I carried it to the bedroom.

“We have electricity only for a few days, and already we have a power failure.”

“I feel lost when the power goes off, like I am deaf-blind.”

1985: Adventure

“When the power is off, the silence is perfect. I feel deaf-blind, too. It’s so quiet that I can hear the wick hissing as the kerosene burns.”

“The Snuggler must do good business during power failures.”

“Romantic candlelight dinners of propane-cooked food. I heard soup or stew is always on the menu because the unsold meat and vegetables from the store are cooked by the Snuggler—they have the same owners.”

Pearl stayed home and painted while I commuted to work.

When I came home from work, she signed, “My neck is sore. When I was painting, the ladder shook, so I looked down. Whisky was bumping it to call me. The kitten was in his mouth, dead. Whisky was sad. His eyes said, ‘Please fix my friend.’ Tonight, your first job is to bury the cat.”

The telephone rang. As I put down the telephone, I laughed. “A man saw our advertisement and asked if he could rent our barn to live in himself, with no toilet, heat, and light!”

“There are some weird people on Bowen Island.”

Pearl was right, from bankrupts to barons, all of us avoiding the city in our own way, all of us preferring to live closer to nature. Society was compressed on Bowen; every sort of person lived side by side.

The Howe Sound Queen rolled, pitched, and yawed its way to Horseshoe Bay as I sat in our truck eating good pastry and drinking bad coffee from the Bowen Island Bakery. Pearl had been rostered on a different shift that day; otherwise, we would have commuted together. I loved the view of the mountains from the solitude of the truck on the days when I drove off the island to buy provisions.

A knock on the window brought me back to reality. A man about my age stood at the window, his collar turned up against the salty breeze.

“My name is Stanley. You and your deaf wife bought the Thaxter place, didn’t you?”

I laughed and told him our names. He asked me for a ride, so I told him to hop in. It didn’t take long to make friends on Bowen and, as it would turn out, to lose them after we left and no longer served a purpose in each others’ lives.

“I couldn’t help notice the antenna on your truck. I’m a radio ham too! I work downtown at Eaton’s department store, in debt collections.

1985: Adventure

On the weekends, I'm a Vancouver Police reservist."

"Interesting. I was a West Vancouver Police reservist for three years."

"I wanted to be a career cop, but I didn't qualify because I'm deaf in my right ear. I'm trying to get Laurent to set up an RCMP reserve here."

"Why did you join the reserves? I joined because my friend is a cop and so I could ride my motorcycle without getting tickets."

"Because I use the police databases to help me trace debtors.* My wife and I are building a house on Eagle Cliff. Come visit." Stanley sketched a map. "Park at the bottom, and walk up. You'll never make it to the top in this pickup truck. Bring Pearl. Gertrude would like to meet her."

Pearl and I decided to introduce ourselves to Fran so she would have no reason to surprise us with a visit. On a weekend morning, we walked across the street and down a driveway to a graveled compound with a bungalow on one side and cinder-block sheds on the other. The sheds gave the bungalow a view of machinery, construction materials, and fuel drums. A pickup truck with a row of spotlights on its roof was parked in the compound. Smoke wafted from the bungalow's chimney.

When I rang the doorbell, barking erupted inside. A woman about a decade older than us with permed blonde hair, jeans, and an intense, intelligent face opened the door, holding back a huge German Shepherd.

"*Hello!* I was wondering when you'd drop by. Come in. On Bowen Island, you can drop in on your neighbors and borrow a cup of sugar. Don't mind Bear. Coffee?"

The dog sniffed us as we walked inside. The smell of wood smoke and cigarettes filled our nostrils. A burly man dressed like a lumberjack stood up from a sagging sofa and shook my hand.

"Morning," he muttered, offering menthol cigarettes. "I'm Wayne."

We accepted coffee but declined the cigarettes. Wayne sat down, watching TV. Fran handed us mugs of Nescafé, and we sat down. A detailed wooden model of our house sat on their TV.

"I hope you're not upset we bought your house."

* There were no data privacy regulations in the 1980s.

1985: Adventure

“Oh no, that land wasn’t important. We own the land all around the lake, hundreds of acres. We’ll subdivide it when prices recover.”

“Bullshit,” signed Pearl. I didn’t interpret her sign.

“Then why didn’t you sell some land to keep the house?”

“Subdivision takes time.” Fran pointed to the wooden model. “That was from the architects. My former husband and I had it designed for adults at one end and teenagers at the other so the kids wouldn’t hear us romping in our bedroom. That’s why the living and family rooms are in the middle. We planned how the sun and moon would shine through the windows and skylights. Take the model with you. We don’t need it now, and, besides, you might want to sell the house back to us someday.”

Pearl walked over to the model and examined it.

“No, you keep it,” I signed and said. “We have the blueprints.”

“My husband wanted to eat in the dining room every day. That’s why the dining room has the best view of the property. I’d love to see the house when you are finished.”

We kept our visit brief. As we walked back home, Pearl signed, “I don’t trust either of them.”

“Me, too. I didn’t take model because I don’t want to owe her any favors.”

Later, I searched the lakeside property titles at the Land Titles Office. The land around the lake was owned by the Union Steamship Company, which had once owned much of Bowen Island. Fran’s grandiose lying only served to impress others or, perhaps, herself.

May:

Housebroken

On Sunday afternoon, Frank packed his tools, but this time he approached us instead of slipping away. He told us our house was substantially complete, so we were ready to apply for our Certificate of Occupancy. He handed me the telephone number of the inspector.

It was obvious to us that much needed to be done and that Frank was weeks behind schedule. I suggested we walk around the house to make a list of the incomplete items, but Frank refused. Instead, he complained

1985: Adventure

to us that we'd been living in our house for weeks at his expense. We knew Frank didn't deserve the full and final payment, but I didn't want to alarm the bank that held our second mortgage. I agreed to call the inspector, counting on him to point out any important defects even if the house met the minimum legal standards for human occupancy.

I left work early on inspection day and arrived before the inspection was due to take place. I was surprised to find the inspector and Frank standing outside the house and Whisky barking furiously inside it. I was even more surprised when the inspector handed me our Certificate of Occupancy! I asked how he could do that when he hadn't entered the house. He explained he had "dropped by a few times" during construction. I was stunned. Frank smiled. As soon as the inspector climbed into his government pickup truck and drove off, Frank demanded the rest of his money, and he drove off, too.

I needed to figure out how much to pay Frank. I phoned Ross, apologized for not accepting his quotation, explained our predicament, and asked him for a quote to complete Frank's work. Ross said he had no work at the moment, so he agreed to come that evening.

I picked Pearl up from the ferry and tied Whisky outside. After dinner, the dog barked, and Ross walked in the unlocked front door without knocking. I opened bottles of beer.

Ross walked around the kitchen and whistled a long, single note. "The walls have to come down. You needn't have painted them because you're gonna have to rip the wallboard off and put it up the right way so that it holds up your ceiling." He tapped the wall near the ceiling, poked his finger through it, and laughed. "Air! The gap is at the top. Frank didn't lift the wallboards up before nailin'm down, so they don't support the ceiling! In six months, the edges are goin' to be hangin' down wavy-like. Then you can rip the walls *and* the ceiling off."

Ross had seen this right away. I was stunned. Pearl was so furious, I thought she might faint, but I couldn't tell if she was furious with Frank or with me. Tearing the walls down was only the beginning of the litany of defects Ross pointed out as we walked around the house. He showed us Frank's shortcuts, errors, and frauds one by one. He had ruined the vapor shields, which is why our skylights dripped water. He had put

1985: Adventure

four-inch door frames into our six-inch walls, so we had to replace all the exterior frames. We had to replace the doors, too, because Frank had used interior doors on the exterior; they weren't waterproof, and they had no sills, which is why we had seen mice in the house. He had hung the power line right in front of the family room windows to save himself a hundred dollars. How ignorant we were! And this was only the start.

Ross walked into the kitchen, looked at the range hood, laughed, and showed us how it was dangling from a few screws, like a decoration. "I could pull that down with my fingers. I smell sewage. Let's go outside."

Outside, he pointed to the roof. "There are no roof vents as required by building code."

"The inspector didn't even have to go in the house to see *this*. Why didn't he open his eyes and do his job?"

"Good question, never seen anything like it. Where's the attic hatch?" We went inside and into the bedroom. Ross took my flashlight, climbed the ladder, and disappeared into the attic. Pearl and I stared at each other, devastated. When Ross reappeared, he said with disbelief, "Frank's vented the septic, the kitchen range hood, and the bathroom exhaust fan into your attic! And he nailed your ceiling boards direct to the trusses! *That* explains why your wallboards are almost an inch too short and have that gap at the top. Because he didn't use strapping, your ceiling is never goin' to be flat. And he used half-inch wallboard for the ceiling, not five-eighths ceiling board. But you're stuck with it now. Get Franco to spray your ceiling with spackle. Your house will look like a Greek restaurant, but you won't see the waves in the ceiling."

We walked down to the basement. Ross pointed the flashlight into the crawlspace and roared with laughter. "Jesus, where'd he get that rusty water tank? From a *trailer*?" Ross traced the pipes with the light beam. "Dangling, no support at all. But where do your water pipes go?"

"Up over there, and across the ceiling."

"Through the *attic*? They're gonna freeze in winter, and when they burst, they'll wreck the house if you're not there to shut off the water. Frank must have known this, so he didn't give a shit. If he wanted to time bomb your house, he couldn't have done a better job than this."

"I watched him do it. I didn't know it was wrong."

1985: Adventure

Ross sniffed the basement soil where the black septic pipe entered it. “It smells worse down here than in the attic. Get your True-Temper and dig.” I shoveled down to the pipe elbow. Ross shook the pipes. “No glue! You’re fertilizing your basement with your shit.” Ross pointed at the pink hole in the foundation behind the drainpipe and shook his head in astonishment. “The bastard’s cut off your foundation drain! He’s used that foundation drain for your septic, so rainwater drains into your basement. That’s why your house is so damp. And your foundation drainpipes from the other sides flow in farther down that hijacked pipe, so the rainwater from those sides flows into your septic tank. Rainwater will wash raw, undigested sewage into your disposal field and ruin it.”

We walked outside again. Ross pointed to the pipe that Frank should have used, then pointed to the mound behind the house. He told me to dig there, but I only had to scrape the soil to uncover blue fiberglass.

“Your septic tank is tilted 20 degrees! You need to pump it out and dig it up and put it down straight and reconnect it to the right pipe.” He traced the flashlight beam along a dotted line of plastic pipes scattered down the slope from the house to the garden and laughed. “Frank didn’t glue your septic pipes! Your sewage is pouring down the hill.”

We were speechless. Frank had let us down through shoddy work, but I had to live with the pain of having let Pearl down through shoddy decision-making.

“You know what? I’d say your house isn’t fit to live in.”

“How much to make it fit to live in?”

“Ten or 20 grand, maybe as much as your original contract. You’ll have to pay to dig up and tear down and buy new things and put things back. You can’t reuse anything except the septic tank. A lot of small jobs cost more than one big one. I won’t do it. I don’t want to fix no crap. I don’t want to get involved in your dispute. You should sue the bastard. It’s a good thing you only hired Frank to finish *half* your house.”

After Ross left, we wrote down the defects. The bank needed another appraisal before it would make its final advance, so we gave Frank a few more weekends to finish whatever he might deign to finish.

Jun: One Shot Can't Be Traced

Our lives settled into a routine synchronized with the ferry. We awoke at 6:30, we took the 7:30 ferry followed by the express bus, and we arrived downtown at 8:30. We enjoyed our commute together, for we signed for ten hours a week, talking about anything and everything; we shared the newspaper; and we read books. The ferry and bus were havens for bookworms, and we often talked to other commuters, while I interpreted. Sometimes shift changes at Pearl's post office forced us to travel separately and take turns picking each other up in the truck or take turns hitchhiking on the trunk road, which was easy and safe.

I lived life with the best of both worlds: by day, I worked in an office with a panoramic view of the Coast Mountains; by night I built our paradise-in-the-making. Pearl envied me. Her job was repetitive, unpleasant, and dusty while mine was interesting, pleasant, and clean.

One afternoon I sat on the express bus next to a man in a black cotton overcoat. He appeared just a few years older than me, but his hair was thinning and tinged with gray. He had an infectious smile, and I liked him immediately. His aviator glasses magnified the twinkle in his eye. He looked up from reading *Object Oriented Programming*.

"Haven't you anything more interesting to read than *Guide to Being Your Own Contractor*?" He laughed.

I couldn't help but laugh with him. "I see you are in computers."

"That's my job, that's what I do. The commute gives me time to learn and meditate. In a month, you can sit on the top of the ferry and suntan while you commute. Take *that*, citysiders!"

"It beats commuting through Toronto Union Station, which I did for two years. How long have you been living on Bowen Island?"

"Fifteen years."

I smiled. "That's a long time."

"On Bowen, either you just got here, or you've been here forever. You love Bowen Island, or you hate it. I came in the hippie days when Bowen was Vancouver's counterculture hideaway. Flower power, back-to-the-land, Jefferson Airplane, the sixties, all of it. Police helicopters hovering

over our gardens, inspecting our greenery.”

“Where do you live?”

“In a house at Miller’s Landing where I can walk to the ferry. I’m not on the farm now. The farm was an acreage at the end of a dirt road. A ranch, really, not a farm. I raised sheep for a decade.”

“Did it pay?”

“I lived on it, under the circumstances. It’s a long story.”

“Good. It’s a long commute.”

The man looked at his watch and smiled. “Then I’d love to share it with you. Once upon a time, there was a guy named Fernie, a rich engineer and investor who never lived on the island. Fernie bought 20 acres nestled in the hills back when land was cheap. It had a broken-down cabin built by the original settlers. It was in a gulch, but it had sunshine because the hills to the southwest are low. It’s one of the few spots on Bowen where grass can grow. It was lovely, but to Fernie, it was a tax deduction—provided, that is, that it was worked as a farm. So I took care of Fernie’s moldy place for free rent, a stipend, and a share. I became a sharecropper. It was 1972 or thereabouts. There were only 500 people on Bowen Island then. There are way too many now, and the new ones are not my kind of people.”

“How long had the cabin been abandoned?”

“Not long. A few years before me, a hippie couple approached Fernie and asked if they could squat in the cabin if they fixed it up. Fernie agreed. The first winter, they nearly gave up, and by the third winter, they’d had enough. Luckily, they told me about the place. I moved in and built the farm for Fernie.”

“Alone?”

“Most of the time. It was fabulous, literally. I felt like I was living a fable, living the dream. Living without human reinforcement purified my soul. Profound silence in a convent begins at sundown and lasts until dawn, but I had silence all the time. The stars were my friends.”

“But ... then ... why did you give all that up?”

“I quit while I was ahead.” He gave me an enigmatic smile. “I moved to the cove and started a garage and machine shop. I have lots of tools.”

“I imagine so. What did you do there for power? For water?”

1985: Adventure

“I had no power, just a battery for the stereo that Fernie charged for me. Lighting was kerosene. Heating was wood, of course. ‘A man who cuts his own wood warms himself twice,’ as you’ll discover. I pumped water from a well, pure as the driven snow. And I got a lot of snow.”

“What was the cabin like?”

“It had one room and a loft for storage, a romantic place for a hermit. There was an outhouse behind it. I hung my toilet seat on the wall behind the stove and carried it outside when I needed to shit. Nothing stimulates the bowels more than a hot seat in cold air.”

“What a unique living room decoration that must have been.”

Our bus stopped at Horseshoe Bay, and we waited in the departure lounge for the ferry. He took a bottle of Karo out of his overcoat and took a long swig. I noticed his breath smelled of ammonia.

“I was starting to fade. Want some?”

“Corn syrup? No, thanks. Do you have diabetes?”

“Type One.”

“Is diabetes why you quit while you were ahead?”

“No. I left the farm because I went blind.”

“You’re not blind! I saw you reading.”

The man grinned. “I was driving. I could see, and then the world started to go dark. I stopped, and I waved for someone to take me to a hospital. It was retinal hemorrhage. I was blind for years, a member of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. I learned to read Braille, walk with a white cane, and eat by putting my meat on the plate at six o’clock. I never mastered urinals very well—I could never be sure if I was pissing into one or on the wall between two of them. The CNIB gave me vocational training, and that’s where I learned computer programming. I program assistive devices for the blind.”

“But I saw you reading.”

“Thanks to lasers, I eventually regained some sight. Insulin buys you time, but diabetes slowly destroys your eyes. I hope I don’t get arthritis or gangrene. I get physiotherapy every week.” He held out his hands to show me how thick and hard his skin was.

“Would you like a lift? My truck is in Snug Cove.”

“Your blue one. No, thanks. I have to walk home because I counted

1985: Adventure

on burning the calories in the syrup. Good luck at the Thaxter place.”

When I arrived home, Pearl and I hugged and kissed. “I met a interesting man on the ferry. We talked and talked, and we never asked each other’s name! Maybe he already knew mine. He knew where we live and what truck we drive.”

“Nice for you to make a new friend. For me, there is not even a dog anymore. Whisky pushed the insulation out of the wall downstairs and escaped through the hole.”

We drove around the property, up and down the trunk road, and up and down the side roads in the twilight searching for Whisky.

“I feel stupid shouting *Whisky!* I sound like I’m drunk. His tag has the telephone number of the animal hospital. We must wait.”

No one called the number on his tag, so, in the morning, I called Bowen’s one-man police detachment. Constable Laurent was about my age, but he was sagacious for his years and preternaturally handsome.

“RCMP,” answered Constable Laurent.

“This is Derrick King. Our German Shepherd ran away yesterday. Have you seen him?”

“So he’s yours! He’s at the dog pound. He chased my jeep along the trunk road, so I opened the door, and he jumped in. Don’t you know dogs are not allowed loose on Bowen Island? Whisky had a great time in my jeep, barking out the window, and he did me a favor: word is going around that the Bowen Island RCMP detachment has a police dog.”

“I can picture it. I was in the West Vancouver Police Reserve. Whenever you want to borrow Whisky, just ask.”

I drove to North Vancouver and bailed Whisky out of the dog pound. Pearl was cooking dinner when I returned.

“While you were out, I wanted to cook chicken pie, so I followed a recipe. I finished it, but the chicken pieces are still sitting on the table. I don’t understand the instructions.”

We howled with laughter. She had used a recipe from her McCall’s Cooking School binder. I could see why she liked these recipes: they had photos of every step. But after buying half the cookbook for hundreds of dollars she had canceled her subscription, so she had half a cookbook with no index because the publisher cleverly bundled the index with the

1985: Adventure

last installment. Pearl could not understand or look up cooking jargon like “reserve broth.” With the microwave, I helped her to finish the pie.

“Whisky’s adventure cost \$100, fine and ferries. I have no cash left.”

“Take some money from my wallet.”

There was no bank or ATM on Bowen Island, so, as Pearl suggested, I went into the bedroom and took some money from her wallet. While putting her wallet back in her handbag, I noticed a conversation note at the bottom. I tilted her handbag toward the light and, to my astonishment, saw the words “danger” and “Derrick.” Then, I heard Pearl coming, so I put her handbag down and walked out of the room.

That night I could hardly sleep, wondering why she had written those words together. I had never looked in her bag before, just as I had never looked in Eugénie’s bag, and I expected my wife to respect my privacy, too. In the morning, while she was busy, I looked in her bag.

The note was gone.

Pearl and I didn’t want to work on the house until Frank had completed it, so we turned our attention to homestead projects. We bought a Stihl chainsaw, a hardhat, and tree-felling wedges. I studied the instructions, put on the hardhat, hearing protectors, and gloves, and carried our new tools into the forest. I limbed and bucked windfalls for hours, then dragged myself into the house and slumped into a chair. It was hard, dangerous work. I loved it.

I persisted a few days later. I felled, limbed, and bucked trees. I was careful to make sure the trees fell in the right direction because they could have killed us if I had made a mistake in cutting or wedging. We felt as insignificant as ants when the timber crashed to the earth. Pearl helped me load the rounds into the truck. Each time the truck was full of wood, we drove back to the house and stacked it. We worked as a team and slept deeply every weekend, exhausted.

The man in the black cotton overcoat approached me at the bus stop and grinned. “Derrick, my name’s Ralph. Say hello to Pearl for me.” The bus arrived. Ralph flashed a card to the driver, walked to the rear of the bus, and sat down. I sat next to him.

“How did you board the bus without paying?”

1985: Adventure

“I’m a VIP.” Ralph chuckled as he showed me his Vision Impaired Pass. “Now you know why I wear sunglasses while I’m waiting for the bus. No one asked me to return my VIP pass when I could see again. And I was a licensed driver even while I was blind—no one asked me to hand in my driver’s license, either!”

“What did you do when you weren’t shepherding?”

“I’d go hiking with my dairy goat, bring my cup, and milk her for refreshment. She’d carry my pack, too. Of course, I had to wait for her to eat the roses along the way. My only problem was dogs. A ewe costs a hundred bucks. The .44 magnum on my belt gave me a reputation as a wacko even though it is legal to patrol your property with a gun.”

“Surely that kept the number of visitors down. You only shot dogs?”

“And deer. Fernie and I love venison. He installed a propane freezer for me. Hunting is legal on Bowen with a longbow and a hunting license. So I bought a longbow and a license.” Ralph grinned. “And I shot them with my gun—in season, of course. I cast my bullets and reloaded my shells. One shot can’t be traced. Your barn would make a good hunting blind. At twilight, you could sit on a bale in your hayloft with the doors open and wait for a deer to walk by. That’s what I did. Hay muffles gunshots, but if you don’t want anyone to hear anything at all, drill out a lawnmower muffler to make a silencer, and clamp it over the muzzle.”

The bus braked down the long hill into Horseshoe Bay. Ralph looked at his watch. “We have an hour. Come, sit in my jeep with me.”

I followed him to a Suzuki jeep like Rokus’s, and we got in. Ralph handed me his key. “Have a look in my glovebox.”

I unlocked the glovebox and took out a revolver. “A Charter Arms five-shot belly gun. It looks like a .38. You must be paranoid.”

“Paranoia is why I prefer revolvers—the empty shells are retained.”

“I’ve got a Charter Arms gun, too, an AR7 .22 folding rifle. Are you licensed to drive around with this pistol?”

Ralph nodded. “Yes, I am. I am a member of the Barnet Rifle Club. I have a Permit to Convey my gun to the range. Barnet is on the other side of Vancouver, so that lets me drive my gun anywhere between here and there when the range is open—and it’s open daily except for Christmas.

1985: Adventure

Last year, I drove by a deer lying on the side of the road near Tunstall Bay; someone must have hit it. I rushed home and got my gun, but by the time I returned, the deer was gone. Now I carry my gun in my jeep.”

I put the gun back. Ralph was a good storyteller, and I loved to listen.

“Dynamite is fun. I enjoyed stumping, clearing land. I kept my box of dynamite under the sofa. Once in a while, I’d invite a visitor to my cabin. At night we’d sit by the stove in the kerosene light, stoned in the silence of the woods. When the fire ran low, I’d wait until he suggested I add some wood, and then I’d take a stick of dynamite and toss it into the stove. You’ve never seen *anyone* bolt out a door faster into the snow.”

My jaw dropped; I knew Ralph was telling the truth.

Ralph roared with laughter. “Without a blasting cap, dynamite is just expensive fuel. Two bucks a laugh but worth it every time. I’m telling you this only because I can’t have you participate in my practical joke.”

“What a lifestyle!”

“It was. I had a reverse-serial life. Most people live parallel lives, where you live to work. You work and live every day, so you can’t optimize your work life or your own life. A serial life is where you work to live. First, you work to build a stash. Then, you live your life if you still have the strength. People who live serial lives often end up bitter because by the time they can afford to retire early, they don’t have the health to enjoy it. I did it the other way. But reverse-serial only works for stoics, like me, who are prepared to spend our youth in poverty.”

The ferry arrived. Ralph gave me the warm smile I still miss.

“I didn’t expect to have to drive after dark. Please drive me home. At night, my vision narrows to a tunnel. I can’t see you now. Lack of night vision is why I had to leave the farm, not diabetes. But I can’t complain. I lived while I could. I lived!”

Ten Acres Enough

The telephone rang. “Have you already let your barn?” said a man with an English accent.

“It’s still available. Why don’t you come over?”

1985: Adventure

“Splendid. We’ll be there in an hour.”

Whisky barked as a yellow Volvo station wagon rumbled up the driveway. A man with a gray beard and a woman with auburn hair stepped out. After introductions, we sat down at the table with the dog at our feet. Pearl made tea and I explained our half-a-house construction project to Alan and Rose.

“When we moved to Canada, Rose dreamed we would have an acreage, ride horses, raise lambs, and spin wool. We grew up with Barbours, Wellingtons, and Tweed, read *Ten Acres Enough*, and fantasized. Here we are on Bowen, with no land. When Rose saw your advert, she thought we might arrange to keep sheep on your property.”

“Let’s see what we can do together. It’s important for fields to be foraged. Alder saplings are already shooting up in the field like weeds.”

The four of us walked around the property with Whisky. Back in the house, I put the property plan on the table, and Alan and Rose began to outline their plans for running a handful of ewes and their lambs in the lower field. They sketched a fence built with wooden posts, barbed wire, and wire mesh. It would form a triangle bordered by the road, driveway, and property line.

“Your drawing is very clear,” signed Pearl.

“I’m an architect,” said Alan, “but I’m not licensed to practice in Canada, so I work as an assistant.”

Their idea was for them to supply the materials and pay for a tractor to set the fence posts, and then we would all build the fence together. Pearl and I would build an animal shelter in the lower field and, because the water in the lower field would freeze in winter, allow Alan and Rose to use the barn and the upper field in the winter for lambing. This meant that Pearl and I would have to fence the upper field before winter. Their project would last two years, after which the lower field fence would be ours. It sounded like fun, and Pearl and I happily agreed.

The appraisal for the bank was issued on 12 June. Frank’s worst defects were not obvious, even to the appraiser, so the appraisal was high enough for me to draw the rest of the mortgage.

The following Sunday, Frank and his son installed windowsills. At

1985: Adventure

the end of the day, he *and his son* approached us, and Frank asked for the balance of the contract price. I asked them to finish the rest of the work before they asked for the rest of the money, but Frank replied that the Certificate of Occupancy was proof that the rest of the work was complete and that all the work they had done since then was gratuitous. Henceforth, he said, they would do no more work and had to be paid in full. Frank and his son gathered their tools and left.

I went to see Clifford, a lawyer, the next day. I showed him the contract, recounted the events, and asked him what to do next.

Clifford shook his head and said, "You're dead."

"He does the work, and then I pay the money. He hasn't finished all the work so I haven't made all the payment."

"You shouldn't have signed this one-sided contract with a shell company. Your problem isn't what the contract says but what it doesn't say. It doesn't say that the work must comply with building codes. It doesn't say that materials must be new. It doesn't give a completion date. It doesn't give any remedies when something goes wrong. You can't enforce any standard of quality. The only formal deliverable is a Certificate of Occupancy, so by moving in and getting one, you've accepted completion. Pay him now, and get it over with."

"Everything he is doing now is making the house *worse* and will have to be redone. It's cheaper if he stops and I get someone who knows what he's doing to take over."

"You can't let him come this far and then announce it's all no good. You have to pay him the full amount of the contract not to come back."

That night Pearl and I had dinner at the Snuggler and discussed the mess we were in. If we gave Frank the rest of the money, we would have no money to repair and replace his work on the east side of the house, let alone start to finish the unfinished west side. Our frustration poured out. The more we talked, the more furious we became. We ignored Clifford's advice and decided to try to get the work in the contract finished by Frank or, in the likely event that he refused, to withhold enough money to pay a qualified builder to do it. We drove home. I telephoned Frank and told him we expected him to return next weekend to finish his work. Frank said nothing in reply.

1985: Adventure

An hour later, Frank arrived with his wife, both sons, and his baby. We all sat around the table. With a salesman's smile, Frank said that his work was complete because we had moved in six weeks ago, we had received a Certificate of Occupancy, and we must have received an appraisal of the value his work had added to our house, and, with that, our final mortgage withdrawal. Frank demanded to be paid in full. His family stared at Pearl and me, waiting for a reply.

I reminded Frank he had advised us not to move in because he was behind schedule. I asked him to walk around the house to agree on a list of defects before we agreed on the amount to be paid. Frank sat as still as a statue, so I described the defects Ross had identified so far; they were obvious to me now, and many of them could be seen from the kitchen table. While I was speaking, often without signing, Pearl wrote a few notes on a sheet of paper to Mrs. Schutt, who refused to turn her head to look at them. Frank's family were acting like robots.

Frank's response to every defect was, "You accepted that," "You wanted the lowest price," "That was your responsibility," "You moved in," "You wanted it like that," "That is as per contract," "The inspector approved that," and even, "That was your idea."

I told Frank that we didn't realize the extent of the defects until he built 14 windowsills and window frames in one afternoon, 15 minutes for each one, and his carelessness became obvious. I told him we then had a professional contractor estimate the cost of completing the contract, which was \$10,000 to \$20,000. I asked Frank if he planned to finish the rest of the work, and quickly, or if I should pay others to do it.

Frank switched his mantras to: "Are you saying I can't come back?" and "Are you saying you are not allowing me to finish?" and "Your overdue payment is causing me trouble with my suppliers."

Frank's canned responses made it sound like he was following a lawyer's script. Meanwhile, the rest of the Schutt family remained eerily silent, as if a tape recorder were running in Mrs. Schutt's handbag.

I said that Pearl and I expected him to return to finish the work in the contract and that he deserved payment for the work he had finished so far, which was the \$24,000 contract price less the amount necessary to finish it to a reasonable standard. It was clear that Frank wasn't going to

1985: Adventure

leave empty-handed, and I wanted to be reasonable, so I offered to pay the rest of the contract price less a holdback of \$10,000, per Ross's lowest estimate. Frank didn't say anything. I wrote a check for \$14,000. Without word, Frank took the check, put it in his pocket, and stood to leave. Mrs. Schutt tried to take the paper on which Pearl had written her notes, but Pearl held it. Frank marched his family out the door. Whisky barked at them until the sound of Frank's truck faded away.

That night, the water dripping from the bedroom skylight onto our plastic bed sheet kept me awake. It reminded me of a time bomb ticking.

In the morning, from my office, I called Clifford and updated him.

"You've just eliminated any incentive for Frank to work. You are going to discover more problems; that's why standard practice is to withhold *double* the cost estimate. Because homeowners use quality as an excuse not to pay, the law is biased in favor of builders. Frank knows this. He'll lien your house and refer the balance to a collection agency. He'll stop *working*, but he won't stop *collecting*. Stop your check now!"

I rushed to the bank, but I was too late to stop the check: it had cleared. Frank must have deposited it as soon as the bank opened.

Because I worked for a bank I could access Frank's record at the Credit Bureau, which I should have done before signing his contract. I discovered he never paid his credit cards on their due dates, and he took three months to pay his other bills. I asked Leo to check Frank's criminal record. He had no criminal record in the CPIC and NCIC police databases, but he and his son had dozens of unpaid parking fines. Frank cared more about money than about his integrity and reputation.

Until the stalemate was resolved, Pearl and I avoided touching any part of the house for which Frank was responsible—which was most of it—so we lived like squatters while we improved the land and the barn.

One Saturday morning, I picked up my electric saw. The weather was getting warmer, so I didn't wear gloves. I felt my hand tingle. I wet a fingertip and touched the saw—electricity shot up my arm. I drove to the Building Centre to buy an outlet tester. When I plugged it into the outlet, the red UNGROUNDED lamp glowed. I stared at it in amazement.

1985: Adventure

Pearl and I walked around the house, and I tested all the other outlets. All were ungrounded; the wiring of the whole house was unsafe! I opened the electric panel—there was no ground wire. I searched outside for the ground rod, and I felt sick to realize that this most basic safety component had never been installed and that the house had *passed inspection* without it. All the electrical inspector had to do was plug his tester into any outlet, but he had done nothing. I explained this to Pearl. We realized that while we had depended on government inspectors to enforce a minimum standard of work, Frank had depended on them *not* to do so when he set out to do third-world work for a first-world price.

I pulled up the ground rod by the temporary power pole, pounded it into the soil by the house, and wired it to the panel to correct the defect. Frank had put us at risk of electrocution to save himself an hour's work, but because he had told me to tell the electrical inspector that I had done the work myself, I couldn't report it now. The scam was perfect.

"Whisky hears something," signed Pearl. Whisky was Pearl's ears.

"It's music. It must be coming from Fran's, and it's getting louder."

In the morning, I signed, "It was hard to sleep. There was music all night. I never thought I'd hear anything here but the wind in the trees."

"Please check to be sure no one from the party is outside."

I put Whisky on a leash and walked around our property. It was a glorious summer morning, and the chirping of birds had replaced the thumping of heavy metal rock music. Whisky and I walked down our paved driveway and looked across the road to Fran's. A temporary stage, built from SeaLand pallets, stood in her driveway. It was surrounded by bottles, garbage, and crows. We walked up our gravel driveway to the barn. Whisky growled as we neared it, and I released him. He bolted to the barn and leaped up and down below the hayloft, barking furiously. His instinct to protect me was impressive.

Two heads peered down.

"Fran said we could sleep here," said one of the sleepy faces.

"You have to ask *me* if you want to sleep here. Whose party was it?"

"Fran's son turned sixteen. We all got wrecked."

Whisky stopped barking. "Go now. I'll tie up the dog for a while."

1985: Adventure

I recounted the news to Pearl over pancakes and maple syrup.

“Good. Now they know about our German Shepherd.”

“When we cut firewood today, let’s start near the barn.” I winked.

After coffee, I felled the dying maple tree on the property line near the barn. Disturbed by the chainsaw, the teens climbed down the ladder and shuffled down the driveway. One tree yielded four truckloads of top-quality firewood. Pearl counted the rings. The tree was 50 years old.

Pearl and I followed Stanley’s map to his house. We parked our pickup at the roadside and walked up his steep access road, the pavement turning to gravel after it passed a small cluster of houses. Tracks branched out into the trees and led to barely-visible houses in various stages of completion. Stanley’s place was beyond all of them, at the top, on the other side of the hill from the steep lots which we had seen with Rokus and which had been our introduction to Bowen Island.

The gravel road stopped at an old four-wheel-drive GMC Suburban. We walked past spare truck parts to a single-axle trailer. Behind the trailer stood the frame of a two-story house, the tarpaper sheathing braving the elements without the protection of siding or windows. Rectangular holes marked where windows would someday be installed. It looked more like an abandoned house than one under construction.

“This is like the three-bed travel trailer my family had,” I signed.

“It’s so small. I can’t imagine living in this day after day.”

The curtains were open. A small woman with straight brown hair opened the door, greeted us, and beckoned us inside.

“Welcome!” Stanley shouted. “Wait while I clear some space. We don’t get many guests.” We squeezed into the bench seats on both sides of the table. Boxes, clothes, tools, and books blocked what little daylight penetrated the trailer through the forest and louvered windows. “We use the table-bed as a table, the sofa-bed as a bed, and the bunk bed as storage. For our toilet, there’s a Porta-Potty outside.”

Pearl looked around. “Where do you shower?”

“At work. Or we heat water on the propane stove, wash each other with a cloth, and then rinse outside. I made a screen for Gertrude. We’ll have to be living in the house by winter because here we only have a

heater running off an extension cord from my neighbor. The cord is so long, we can't turn more than one thing on at a time. There's no phone; for communications, ham radio comes in handy." I pointed at a black oval sticking out from under a pile of clothes on the bunk bed. Stanley grinned. "That's my Remington 12-gauge."

"His gun lets him feel he's got something to protect," said Gertrude.

"Things were better before. With the money I made from being a bailiff, we bought a tow truck. It was hard work but well paid, and I wasn't a sitting duck for the taxman. But, one by one, the private lots contracted to UniPark, so we went bust. Gertrude's waitressing kept us going. We once impounded a Rolls-Royce. You should have seen the smirks as I drove around with a Silver Spur hanging from my truck! The next day, a guy knocks and asks how many trucks we got."

"I told him we had three," said Gertrude. "But we had only one."

"So this guy gives us three padded car covers and says, 'If you ever tow a Rolls-Royce again, you must cover it first.' Ha-ha!"

Pearl laughed. "My boss had a Rolls-Royce. He owned a restaurant on Broadway where I worked as a waitress. I gave customers a paper and pencil with the menu, and they wrote what they wanted on the paper. I quit when a corpse was discovered. I saw the dead body fall out from behind the curtain. The police interviewed everyone. It's true! I've seen so many things you wouldn't believe."

"You were a waitress?" I was amazed to hear Pearl had ever been a waitress. Her dead-body-behind-the-curtain story sounded like a cliché, but she was convinced it was true.

"I became a waitress after I left my husband."

The four of us walked to their construction site. Their house had exterior walls and a roof, but little more. Stanley opened the front door by twisting a stick on a rubber band through the empty doorknob-hole.

"The house will have a kitchen, living room, and dining room downstairs, and three bedrooms upstairs. I'm doing the plumbing and wiring now. When that's done, and I get a stove and some drywall in downstairs, we'll move in."

"Where's your well?"

"That comes later."

1985: Adventure

“But how did you get a building permit without water?”

“We don’t have one yet, and that’s why we don’t invite many visitors. No building permit means no mortgage, and that’s why it will take us years to finish our house, from cash. No couple lives like this by choice.”

“Then how are you going to connect power? That needs an electric inspection, which needs an electric permit, which needs a building permit, which needs water and septic permits.”

“I just hope when the house is finished, we won’t have to tear it down. Meanwhile, there’s my neighbor’s water and extension cord.”

Pearl could see that our problems were trivial compared to Stanley and Gertrude’s completely illegal house.

A man in a checkered shirt leaned over from the next booth in the Snuggler. “You guys rented out your barn yet?”

Pearl and I looked up. “I only received two calls, one from a guy who wanted to live in it and the other from a guy who wants it for sheep.”

“That’s because you’re offering *half board*. Most owners already have a stable, or they wouldn’t buy a horse. Donna and me, we got a horse but no stable. We been keeping it at a friend’s. I’m not gonna go up your driveway twice a day to feed him, especially in winter. But *full board*, where you feed him? I’d be interested. That used to be my horse’s barn.”

“Really? How long? There was no water, no fence.”

“For years. Mouse knows where the lake is. He don’t need no fence.”

“Hmm. What’s the going rate for full board?”

“One hundred and fifty dollars. Hay and grain will cost half of that.”

“Where can we get hay and grain?”

The man laughed. “Hay from Vanderveen’s, in Surrey. They deliver, or haul 15 or 20 bales in your truck. The Bowen Garden Shop sells grain. It costs a little more than on the mainland, but you should support local business.”

Pearl nodded. “I know how to feed horses. My uncle has a ranch.”

“I’m Gus.”

“Good to meet you. I suppose you already know who we are.”

“Of course. And I know you opened an account at the Building Centre, like everyone else on the island, because Donna told me.”

1985: Adventure

“Pearl and I need to discuss this for a moment,” I signed and said. “What do you think? I have no experience with horses,” I signed.

“This is our chance to start a business. It is hard to get the first customer.” I did not interpret.

“He says Mouse won’t escape, but we will need a fence by winter for Alan. If it costs \$2,000, it will take two years of boarding to pay for it.”

“That’s for one horse, but we will get more horses.”

Gus pondered our signing, moving his own fingers slowly.

“All right, Gus. When do you want to start?” I signed and said.

“I’ll give you a month to get set up. Make sure you get Buckerfield’s Complete Horse grain and fresh timothy hay, and make a door to lock up the grain to keep Mouse out of it. Don’t feed him the old hay in your barn.” Gus pressed his cigarette into the ashtray. “Then feed him twice a day, rain or shine. Whenever you need a hand, I’ll help you.”

“Here’s the lower field fence plan, bill of materials, and a letter of agreement,” said Alan. “We can repair the cedar fence posts and barbed wire along the trunk road; after half a century, it’s still in good shape. We need new posts only around the other sides. About 270 meters of fencing surrounding a third of a hectare will cost us \$1,000 for which you give us two years of summer pasture plus winter barn use.”

“This is good. We can trust Alan and Rose,” signed Pearl.

“It’s a deal,” I signed and said.

“Shall we start today?”

The four of us put on our work clothes and drove to the lower field. All hands were busy so there was no signing; but there was talking all the while, and Pearl was left out. Rose and Pearl cleared brush and stones; they picked, rolled, and wheelbarrowed rocks to the edge of the field and rolled them into depressions along the edge of the field to level them.

Alan and I repaired the old fence along the road. After the fence was repaired, I drove the truck into the field. Alan chained one sapling after another to the truck, and I accelerated until the chain snapped tight and yanked the root out of the ground. We couldn’t find the iron posts marking the far corner of the property, so we took compass bearings from the other corners, corrected for declination, and marked out the

1985: Adventure

new fence line with orange twine. We drove to the Bowen Building Centre, where Alan bought 80 pressure-treated fence posts. We trucked them to the property in several loads and laid out the posts at two-meter intervals. It saddened us to cut down the beautiful cherry tree in the field, but rotting cherry leaves produce cyanide and are poisonous to sheep. The next day, Pearl and I limbed, bucked, moved, and stacked the cherry wood in the woodpile and cleared the leaves. The hardwood from that tree would heat our house for months the following year.

A few days later, Alan and I greeted Eddie, the island's backhoe man. Our muscles still ached as we held each post while Eddie's Case backhoe pushed it into the soil. Several posts snapped when they hit bedrock. We bought more fence posts, and by late afternoon all were set, a line of green posts around the property. For my 31st birthday, instead of candles around a cake, I had posts around a field.

On Saturday, Alan delivered a Volvo-full of materials: three rolls of sheep fencing, three rolls of barbed wire, nine kilograms of wire staples, a kilo of galvanized nails, a dozen fence rails, and a heavy roll of galvanized guy wire. I put the chainsaw, spirit level, come-along, bolt cutter, sledgehammer, and leather gloves in the truck, and we headed down to the field. Alan and I worked on the fence, sweating and sometimes swearing in the summer heat. It took all day just to build four corner braces and two gatepost braces. Pearl alternated between weeding the vegetable garden and helping Alan and me. Weeding the garden had become a chore because the horse manure we had spread had not yet composted; in our ignorance, we had sewn our garden with weed seeds.

On Sunday, Alan, Pearl, and I started laying sheep fencing. We unrolled, dragged, pulled, and hammered the heavy mesh in the heat. Evening seemed to come quickly, yet only half the sheep fencing was up in the lower field and we hadn't even started the barbed wire.

Alan returned on Saturday and open his Volvo's tailgate. "Can you give me a hand with this urinal? Genuine Villeroy & Boch."

"A urinal? Don't sheep pee on the ground?"

Pearl understood my joke, and she laughed.

"It's a perfect water trough. It's so heavy the sheep can't knock it

1985: Adventure

over. The price was right: free. Help me carry it under the hemlocks to keep it in the shade and to have it closest to the house.”

We continued unrolling, dragging, pulling, and hammering fencing.

I put my gloves on a fence post. “It’s so hot today! Look at the sweat pouring down our faces. But this work feels good.”

“You like it because it’s a hobby and you can wash the sweat and dirt off at the end of the day. I only wish we were building a stone wall that would last generations, like Hadrian’s. Then I’d feel immortal.”

Alan pushed a stick through the mesh, nailed it to a fence post, and nailed a stick under each end to support it. He put one foot on the stick, swung his leg over the fence, and hopped down on the other side.

“Here you go—a stile.”

“So *that’s* what a stile is,” I signed and said.

“How did you understand Mother Goose? Barbed wire is next. Put a stick through the roll. You walk along the fence and unroll it. I’ll staple it loosely to a few poles as you go along, so it doesn’t snag us. We’ll tighten it afterward with the come-along, and staple it.”

We used the come-along to pull each wire so tight it became an infrasonic harp when struck. The pitch was so low that Alan and I couldn’t hear it, so all three of us enjoyed it equally, by feeling it, before we hammered the wires down tight.

Over two more exhausting days we made three more trips around the edge of the field hauling barbed wire, unrolling it, tightening it, and stapling it. The galvanized barbs snagged our clothes and lacerated our skin so despite the summer heat, we wore double clothes for protection.

“This wire is the very *devil!*” said Alan. “Pearl is better at avoiding it.”

“Pearl has deafie eyes. She doesn’t miss anything.”

When the fence was done, Alan and I built a metal aqueduct over the driveway to carry water to the urinal through a valve on a fence post next to the driveway. Twice a day, for years, Pearl or I would pause in the truck on our way to the ferry, open the valve, and wait a minute while water flushed and refilled the urinal for the sheep.

Jul:

Like Ricotta But Firmer

I wiped the dust off the table and put down a legal document. “I checked our property registration at the Land Title Office today. Look—there are three liens on our property title.”

“What is a ‘lien’? And why are there three?”

“A lien is a claim for money. They are from Astra Trading Company, Dick’s Building Supplies, and Frank’s son—for unpaid wages!”

“Bullshit. What next?”

“They expire after one year, so we need to preserve his work for one year. If he sues us, then we will still have the evidence of what he did. We will fix his work only where necessary, and after I take photos of it.”

“We’re stuck! We can’t go forward and finish the house. We can’t go back and change builders. We had just enough money to finish half the house. If Frank wins, we will have to use future money to repair half a house before we can finish the rest of it. We must win!”

“Yes. We need that \$10,000 from Frank to repair his work.”

“So ... no kids yet.” Pearl looked at me despondently.

“I am disappointed, but a year is not long, and we both know it would be wrong to bring a baby into this mess. We will not waste that year. There are many other things we can do to build and enjoy our dream property and make it profitable and beautiful and a great home for kids. We can landscape and finish the barn and fence. But first we must get the septic system installed properly.”

“And change the locks so Frank can’t get in. It is annoying that every door has a different key. Whisky can guard the house for a while.”

“Good idea. Frank’s probably put new tax-deductible doorknobs on his house and given us all his old ones.”

I removed all four latchsets and brought them to a locksmith. Not only were the keys different, the manufacturers were different, so I had to replace three out of the four sets so they could all take the same key.

I made an appointment with Bowen’s drainage specialist and rented a gasoline-powered pump to drain the septic tank by spraying our sewage down the slope behind the house. Every Frank repair cost money, and

1985: Adventure

many also cost us the vacation days we wanted to use to improve the house. Without drains, we could not use our water system or toilet, so Pearl and I went back to living like hillbillies, using the outhouse and showering outdoors in cold water.

The drainage specialist lowered a ladder into the septic tank manhole, took a deep breath, and climbed in. His head soon popped up like a gopher. He reported that the tank wasn't level because it was sitting on a rock, and so when the tank had filled with tons of water, the rock had broken it. The tank was seeping sewage into the soil around the house, which is why the exterior smelled rank. He hoisted the tank with his backhoe and washed it. I rerouted and glued the septic pipes inside the house and restored the foundation drainage that Frank had damaged and disabled. A few days later, when the tank was dry, the specialist patched it, dug a new hole next to the correct outlet pipe with his backhoe, and reinstalled the tank. I turned our water back on. After two weeks of camping, we had water and an indoor toilet.

We had discovered only the first of three plumbing frauds. While we were in bed, I noticed that a clunk-and-gurgle sound repeated every half-hour. Pearl held the lamp for me while I crawled into the crawlspace and checked the air pressure in the water tank; it was low. When I used Pearl's scuba gear to pump air into the tank bladder, I heard air gurgling through the pipes. The secondhand water tank Frank had supplied was broken and could not be repaired. Sears stocked rural water systems in its downtown Vancouver store, so I bought a new tank and replaced Frank's tank, saving his for evidence. These first two plumbing frauds had taken weeks and cost over \$1,000 to correct. I faced these challenges stoically because, for me, it was only time and money, but I didn't have the biological time clock that Pearl never forgot she had.

It took us a month of evenings and weekends of tedious work to install support for the ceiling edges. Frank hadn't installed the ceiling and walls properly, but we couldn't afford to replace them as Ross had recommended. Instead, we patched the ceiling edges by inserting strips of drywall in the gaps at the tops of the walls and by installing strapping at the ceiling edges in the attic. The attic work was hellish in summer, and any slip would tear a hole in the ceiling. We crawled on kneepads in

1985: Adventure

doghouse-sized spaces, kneeled on roof trusses between dusty batts of fiberglass ceiling insulation in the stifling heat, and soaked in our sweat.

The two-man ceiling repairs had to be meticulously planned and executed because when either of us was in the attic, communication was impossible. Even a dropped screw halted work until we could reestablish visual contact. When I was below, I flashed the light to get Pearl's attention; when Pearl was in the attic, she banged on a ceiling truss to get mine. But when Pearl was below, there was no way for me to signal her, so Pearl, who had the added advantage of being shorter, did most of the miserable attic work.

After sanding our repairs, we looked like ghosts. When we pulled off our respirators and goggles, we looked like raccoons.

I made a photo album of Frank's work and took it to Dick's Building Supplies to ask the manager to remove his lien. He was appalled by the photos, showed them to his staff, and said, "This is the worst craftsmanship I've ever seen. I'll remove our lien and recover our debt from Frank. That's the end of his builder's discount, too."

Whisky barked as the yellow Volvo chugged up the driveway on a Saturday morning. After we finished breakfast, Pearl and I walked up the trail to join Alan and Rose in the barn. They had nailed plywood over two of the three barn door openings. They backed the Volvo into the third door, opened the tailgate, and, aided by their three children, released four bleating sheep into the barn.

Pearl's smile reached from ear to ear. "They're beautiful!"

"Dorsets," said Rose. "They are a lovely white, aren't they?"

Pearl tried to pet them. "They walk away."

"When they know you feed them, they won't."

"Why did you put them in the barn, not the field?" I signed and said.

"To trim their hooves and sheep-dip them," said Alan.

"How do you dip a sheep?"

"With a watering-can. I hope we get more on the sheep than we get on ourselves. First, we'll do their pedicure. You have to trim their hooves when they are penned because they don't wear down naturally."

The sheep were clipped, dipped, and left to dry. In the afternoon,

1985: Adventure

Rose and Alan returned and stuffed the sheep back into the Volvo. Alan backed it into the lower field through the wire gate by the stile, and the sheep jumped to freedom and bawled happily in the sunshine. They ran to the other end of the field and started grazing.

“This is a wonderful sight,” Pearl signed.

“Yes, but imagine what our car smells like,” said Rose. “Are you interested in goats? The woman who sold us the sheep, Patty, has two goats to give away, but they must be milked twice daily.”

“What do you think?” I signed and said. “Fresh milk.”

Pearl smiled. “Do you know how to milk a goat?”

“No. Do you?”

“No.”

“You can keep them with our sheep for a while,” said Rose. “Goats don’t like grass, so they’ll first eat the saplings and weeds. When that’s gone, they’ll compete with the sheep for grass, so by then you’ll need to move the goats to the upper field. First, you’ll need to fence it, and well, because goats are champion fence-destroyers.”

“We need to fence it soon for Gus’s horse,” I signed and said.

“Lovely,” said Alan. “Until you can keep your goats near the barn, you’ll be milking them in the rain on your way to work.”

We drove to Patty’s hobby farm in rural Richmond. She was a retiree living her passion for life beyond the sidewalks. She led us past fruit trees wrapped in wire mesh and into her barn. Inside it stood two pure white goats with impressive horns.

“The doe is seven. The yearling is her daughter. Aren’t they adorable?” said Patty, with a gentle Irish lilt. “Saanens—the Holsteins of the caprine world. *Sahme* means cream in German.”

Pearl petted them, and the goats clamored for more petting.

“What do you feed them?” I signed and said.

“Hay and Buckerfield’s Complete Goat. You’ll need a manger.” Patty pointed to a metal rack. “The design prevents the goats from pulling the hay out and making a bed out of it. Goats won’t eat hay off the ground.”

“When they have kids, what do you do with them?”

“Sell them at auction. I try not to think about what happens to them

1985: Adventure

afterward,” Patty said with a sigh. “Have you ever milked?”

We shook our heads. Patty put a handful of grain in a milking stand. The older doe hopped up onto the stand and began to nibble.

“Wash and dry her teats. Give her a pint of grain; that’s her reward for standing while you milk. Milk with both hands in a wave motion.” A stream of milk squirted onto the ground. “But do use a pail to collect it.”

“You look like you are squeezing toothpaste,” signed Pearl.

“You’ll develop a firm handshake. I’ve been drinking her milk for six years—she’s part of me! I can spare three bags of grain. That’ll do for a month. When you go to Buckerfield’s, buy a blue salt block. You try it.”

Pearl milked perfectly. I struggled to learn the technique.

“It’s easier for her because her hands are smaller. You look like you’re trying to put her milk back inside her udder. Are you prepared to do this without fail at seven in the morning and evening?”

Pearl nodded. “We’ll soon have a horse to feed twice a day, too.”

“Are you going to milk when snow is blowing through the windows? When you have the flu and you can’t get anyone to take your chores?”

Pearl and I nodded.

“Grand. Then come to my house.”

Patty poured us milk from one of the bottles in her refrigerator.

“It tastes like normal milk,” signed Pearl.

“Do you mean it tastes like cow’s milk? It’s three percent fat and naturally homogenized. It is healthier than cow’s milk.”

Patty lined the bed of our truck with straw and tied a rope around each goat’s neck. We lifted each animal into the truck and tied it to both sides so it could stand or lie in the center.

“Maybe they’ll be afraid here. Should I sit with them?” signed Pearl.

“Good,” said Patty. “But do sit in front of them, not behind their back ends.”

Pearl climbed into the truck box with the goats, her back leaning against the cab. An hour later, as we crawled along Denman Street in a downtown Vancouver traffic jam, Pearl tapped on the cab window and signed, “Everyone is waving at me! I feel like I am in a parade!” The trio was the center of attention on the ferry, too.

On Bowen Island, we released the goats into the lower field. They

1985: Adventure

jumped off the truck, trotted to a cluster of bushes, and began to eat them. After dinner, Pearl filled a pail with grain. I took a wet cloth and a clean plastic pail. We walked to the field and climbed over the stile.

“Shall we name them Mothergoat and Daughtergoat? How are we going to make the goats come to us to be milked?”

“When they find out we have grain, they will come,” I signed.

Pearl shook the pail of grain. A sheep, not a goat, walked slowly toward her, then broke into a canter. In a moment, all four sheep bellowed and stampeded to Pearl. The goats stood back and watched.

“Oh. *Oh. OH!*” said Pearl, speaking, holding the grain pail over her head as the sheep crowded around her, bleating, pushing, and shoving her legs. It was hilarious. It was hard to imagine that, just a few months ago, we lived in a condominium. I loved my new life with Pearl.

I took the grain bucket from Pearl and walked across the field to the goats. They let me approach, but the sheep wouldn't leave us alone. I held Mothergoat's collar, kicked a sheep, and cursed it. The sheep backed off and stared. Pearl threw pebbles at the sheep until they moved back, and then she chased them away.

Pearl put the milk pail on the ground under Mothergoat's udder and squatted beside it to milk her. I held the goat's collar with one hand and offered her the grain bucket with the other. While she ate the grain with her head buried in the bucket, her body walked sideways away from Pearl to evade the hands of this unfamiliar milker. Mothergoat pivoted around me like a ship pivoting around its anchor. Pearl, still squatting, crept after her udder, walking like a Cossack dancer.

Meanwhile, Daughtergoat walked up to me, stood on her hind legs, and leaned against my chest with her forelegs. As Mothergoat's collar pulled one of my hands sideways, and her head in the grain bucket pushed my other hand down, Daughtergoat butted Mothergoat and shoved her own head into the grain bucket.

Our first milking attempt was utter chaos. Both of us could hardly stop laughing, but the goats still needed to be milked.

Pearl stood up and shook her fists. “I give up! She won't stand still!”

My hands were full, so I couldn't sign. I held the grain bucket over my head, walked Mothergoat to the fence, and tied her collar to a fence

post so she couldn't turn sideways. Pearl wiped her teats and began to milk her. Although the goat could no longer move sideways, the grain had by now already been eaten, so she was no longer interested in standing still. Mothergoat stepped forward—into the milk pail.

Pearl was spitting mad.

I was laughing hysterically. “Just squirt her milk on the ground.”

When Mothergoat's udder was empty, we tied Daughtergoat to the fence and milked her onto the ground as well. We walked home carrying the grain and milk pails. Both were empty, yet both of us were smiling.

I bought a copy of *Goat Husbandry* and read the 350-page classic manual during my commute. Milking soon became quick, efficient, and fun as the goats came to trust us, and after we learned to tie the second goat to the fence while the first one was being milked. The sheep soon learned we had no food for them, and they left us alone.

I made a milking kit that doubled as a stool to make it easy for one person to do the chores alone in the field. Bowen Islanders waved as they drove past on the trunk road, and a few stopped to take photographs. We weighed and recorded the milk and filtered it into milk bottles. We drank a lot of milk. And we had a lot of fun.

Father drove over on a Saturday morning ferry for a day of father-and-son handiwork. We built barn doors and a portable milking stand using power tools in the house, then installed the doors with hand tools in the barn, where there was still no power. We marked out the upper field fence line with orange twine and bought 110 fence posts at the Bowen Building Centre, making several trips in the truck to deliver them. Father drove the truck along the fence line while I pulled the posts off the back one by one and laid them out for the backhoe. Whisky was our companion, often rolling on his back in the grass.

When we were done, we put on slippers and walked into the kitchen. Pearl was looking in the refrigerator. “Take some milk with you. We get three liters a day—we can't drink it fast enough!”

“Make cheese,” said Father. “It's nature's way of preserving milk. I know you'll need rennet to make it; otherwise, I can't help much.”

“Maybe we can advertise it in the *Undercurrent*.”

1985: Adventure

“No, you can’t. It’s illegal to sell food without permits.”

“What about making yogurt?”

“I heard that yogurt-making is difficult,” I signed and said. “I will look up cheese-making, in the library. It sounds interesting, and cheese keeps a long time.”

Pearl and I built a sheep shelter and installed it and the milking stand on opposite sides of the lower field. At milking time, without prompting, Mothergoat and then Daughtergoat climbed onto the milking stand for milking and began to eat grain while we tied the other goat to the fence.

“I’ll milk mornings. You milk evenings while I cook,” signed Pearl.

“Sure. The next step is to get the goats near the barn, closer to the house. They will be company for Mouse when he comes in three weeks.”

I photocopied the cheese-making section of *The Goat in the Kitchen* at the library. “Look at this recipe. It’s easy. Milk, salt, and rennet are all we need. Plus a pot, a thermometer, and cheesecloth.”

Finding a 20-liter pot, a thermometer, and cheesecloth was easy, but it took me an hour on the telephone to find the only rennet tablets in Vancouver—at Galloway’s Specialty Foods, next door to the food fair where Pearl and I first met! I went in and asked for it.

“Rennet? I’ve never heard of it,” said the clerk.

“Cheese-making enzyme. Your Toronto head office said you have it.”

The manager eventually found a few packets behind the yogurt kits. “I’ve never sold it before. Do you own a cow?”

“Goats, on Bowen Island. This expired last year.”

“Then you can have all of it for half price. No one else wants it.”

That night, we made our first cheese. I dissolved two rennet tablets in a cup of water. Pearl steadied the large pot while I poured in bottle after bottle of milk from the refrigerator. One week’s milk filled the pot. I floated the thermometer in the milk. “We heat it slowly to 30 degrees.”

An hour later, I removed the thermometer. “Now we add the rennet solution and wait for the magic to happen.”

After an hour, the milk looked the same. “Now what?” Pearl signed.

I touched the surface. “It’s curd—like milk jelly.”

Pearl felt the curds. “This is like a laboratory experiment.”

1985: Adventure

I sliced the curd in squares. It slowly sank through the greenish-white whey. In an hour, it reached the bottom. Pearl helped me to pour the whey out of the pot and into the sink, leaving the curd in the pot.

I crumbled the curd, draped cheesecloth over our colander, and poured the contents of the pot through it. I kneaded salt into the curds, tied the corners of the cheesecloth together with twine, and held the dripping white orb over a pan.

“This is cottage cheese, from our own cottage. Now we dry it.”

In the basement, I hooked the twine onto a nail sticking out of a floor joist while Pearl set the pan under it to collect the drips. Whisky licked the whey from the pan as fast as it landed.

“The ball of cheese looks like a ghost,” signed Pearl.

“Shall I draw a smile on it?”

Pearl shuddered. “No!”

It was the first installment of a pleasant and rewarding ritual we would perform every two weeks for the next two years.

Pearl and I nailed *No Trespassing* signs around the lower field. Like Stanley’s shotgun, the signs made us feel we had something worth protecting.

We drove to Buckerfield’s in Langley. For Mouse, we bought nine bales of hay, four bags of horse grain, a garbage can in which to store it, a brown equine salt block, a bale of straw for bedding, a manure scoop, a manure fork, and a broom. For the goats, we bought two more bales of hay, a bale of alfalfa, four bags of goat grain, a blue cobalt salt block, a bag of peat moss for bedding, a bag of lime to neutralize urine, an electric fence charger and insulators, and a teat washer.

“Can we afford all this?” signed Pearl.

“Yes, partly from our horse-boarding income but mainly from our tax refunds from the mortgage interest deductions. We will get some of our tax dollars back, like other small business owners.”

Pearl held up the teat washer, a squeeze bottle with a cup at the top. “What is this?”

“It’s a teat washer. Do you want to try it?”

Pearl didn’t understand the joke. She held up a three-tine pitchfork.

1985: Adventure

“We need this for hay.”

“Sure, we’ll buy that, too. We will look like the painting, American Gothic. I will find a copy in the library and show it to you.”

Pearl kept her eyes on the cash register when we checked out to make sure we weren’t overcharged. The cashier smiled and said, “We don’t have many customers who talk with their hands.”

After the hay and grain were loaded and tied down, I drove off, the engine laboring and the steering heavy. The tires looked flat. I realized we were hauling almost a ton, *double* what the Nissan was built to carry. I drove slowly to a gas station and over-inflated the tires. The engine stalled on our first attempt to go up the driveway from the trunk road. I backed down, raced the engine, popped the clutch, and crawled up the driveway with the pedal pressed to the floor. The engine knocked like a coffee grinder as the truck labored up our 20 percent grade.

I climbed into the hayloft and removed the sheet of plywood held in place by bent nails which served as a door. I looked down at Pearl.

“We trade places. You come up here, and I lift the bales up to you.”

I stood on the stack of bales and lifted one at a time past the *DE MAL EN PIS* sign up to Pearl. She pulled each one into the loft. The last three bales were impossible to lift into the loft; not only were my muscles aching, but I was standing too low because there were no more bales in the truck on which to stand. I was dripping with sweat, and my arms were itchy from hay scratches.

“You should see your red face, lifting those bales.”

“Try lifting 45 kilos over your head 12 times. Do you see that beam over the hayloft door? That’s for a pulley. I’ll buy one for next time.”

We carried the last three bales, the grain, and the tools into the feed room and bolted the door against animals. In the kitchen, I filled the teat washer with diluted bleach to make milking more hygienic. We did chores together, bathed together, fell into bed together, and held hands in the I-love-you sign. We were too tired to do anything more, but we were happy. Except for the house construction disaster, we dreamed about the future we were building together. We were optimistic that after Frank was out of the picture we would have a home to be proud of, and we would start a family.

1985: Adventure

I spent lunchtimes at the library researching stable management. “Hay, 2.5 kilos, grain, 750 grams, twice a day. I counted 20 flakes in a bale, so one flake per feeding. Four horses would pay half our mortgage, and four horses would not be much more work than one.”

“Maybe more horses would be *less* work because when we buy lots of feed, we can have it delivered. I will put a clipboard in the hayloft so we can count the bales to make sure no one stole any.”

I returned from the basement with a white teardrop. “*Chèvre*—our first goat cheese.” I put the phenomenon on a Corelle plate.

Pearl stared at it, and then poked it. “It shrank. Is it safe to eat?”

I peeled off the cheesecloth, cut the rubbery orb in half, cut off a wedge, and ate it. We looked at each other, grinning. I gave Pearl a piece.

She ate it. “It tastes like nothing. It has bubbles.”

“It’s like ricotta, but firmer. For salads, pizza, pasta, and sandwiches.”

“I’ll try it in lasagna. It’s special! No one made cheese for me before!”

Aug: **Trout Lake Farm**

On a Saturday morning, Whisky barked. Pearl and I looked down from our dining room window to see a cowboy in a Stetson, barely visible through the trees, riding up our driveway.

“Gus looks like the Marlboro man,” signed Pearl.

Pearl and I slipped on our gumboots and walked to the barn. Gus patted Mouse on the withers and dismounted, the saddle creaking as he climbed down. Pearl scratched the horse under the chin.

“Mornin’.” Gus walked Mouse into the barn, opened the tack room door, and put the saddle and bridle on the floor inside. “Make a saddlehorse from a two-by-four, will ya? Keeps the leather dry. A hitchin’ post’d be good to have, too.”

Mouse walked out of the barn and munched on the grass. After a few mouthfuls, he lay down and rolled on his back.

“Mouse is happy. He’s come home! Sixteen hands of Appaloosa gelding. When he’s happy, I’m happy.” Gus climbed up the hayloft ladder and, a moment later, a clump of hay dropped into a manger.

Mouse walked straight to that stall and ate.

Gus climbed down. “Where did you get that hay?”

“Buckerfield’s.”

“Good. Fernie brought a trailer-load to Bowen last week. Eight tons. He sells in spring when hay prices go up, but he might sell ya some now.”

“Is he the sheep farmer?”

“Yes, he was. How did you know?”

“Ralph told me.”

“He’s a weirdo—I’ve got nothin’ to do with him.”

I took Gus into the feed room. “Here’s the grain you wanted.”

“You’ll give him two cans every day?”

“Yes. There’s water in the barn tap. We’ll fill two big drywall pails for him twice a day so he doesn’t need to go to the lake.”

“Do you ride him often?” signed Pearl.

“Mainly my wife and daughter ride. You can ride him if ya keep up his training. More exercise would be good for him. As sweet a horse as you’ll find.” Gus stroked Mouse on the neck. “And don’t forget to keep the wire gate across your driveway closed. I closed it when I came in.”

“We’ll have to leave it open for now. The barbed wire will wreck my suits. But we’ll have this field fenced in a few weeks.”

“You gotta keep Mouse from goin’ down to the road! Bowen isn’t open range anymore.” Gus lit a cigarette. “Mouse respects electric fences—hang orange string around the field, and he won’t go near it.”

“We’ll try it. And soon we’ll have a real electric fence.”

“Then you can move your goats here. Horses get hooked on goats like people and dogs.” Gus sauntered across the field and down the driveway.

Pearl and I made a fence from bright orange twine. Gus was right: half a ton of horse stayed away from an ounce of twine.

I wired the barn, installing a panel, outlets, switches, and lighting. I enjoyed the work, especially since Frank had never touched the barn. To supply power temporarily, I unrolled the salvaged power cable onto the ground between the barn and the house and plugged it into the dryer outlet. The thick triplex line, designed to be hung from poles, easily fit through Frank’s gap under the laundry room door.

1985: Adventure

I opened a bottle of wine while Pearl did the evening chores. When she returned, she kissed me and slumped onto a kitchen chair.

“Give the dog food and water. Measure the goat grain. Put the grain and milk containers in the carrier. Walk down to the lower field, and climb over the stile. Tie one goat to the fence. Put half the grain in the stand. Wash teats. Milk one goat. Untie that goat. Repeat for the other goat. Climb over the stile, and don’t spill the milk or rip clothes. Walk up the hill to the barn. Refill the horse water pails. Climb up to the hayloft. Drop hay down the hole. Measure horse grain in the feed room, and pour it into the manger. Walk home. Weigh and filter the milk. Wash the container. Morning and night, together and taking turns. I’m tired, but I’m not complaining. Our life is improving little by little.”

“Yes, it is. And tonight I will show you something special.”

“I thought so, because this is our first wine since we moved in.”

After dinner, we walked out into the polarized twilight under the twinkle of the brighter stars. As we walked up the hill to the barn, I heard only our footsteps, insects, and an owl. From the top of the hill, we looked down on Mouse standing in the field. We walked down the hill and into the barn. Two deer stood inside, one wearing a necktie.*

“Thank you for coming,” I signed to the deer. I turned to Pearl and signed, “They promised to come tonight.”

Pearl was incredulous. “*What?*”

“I am just joking.”

She grinned. “The deer are here because they smell food.”

When I opened the feed room door, the noise frightened the deer, so they bolted under the orange twine into the forest.

“Mouse saw the deer escape. He will learn to go under the string.”

“I hope not! Maybe that was Kieran’s deer. Now he is so tame that someone put a necktie on him.”

I flipped a breaker on the electric panel, and the lights inside and outside the barn came to life. It was the first time in the history of the

* This is not fiction—this really happened.

world that light poured over this Bowen Island hillside at night.

“Wonderful! Put spare flashlights in the feed room and hayloft for when the power fails, just in case.”

“Now, go up to the loft, and look up there.”

Pearl climbed the ladder. Mouse heard her, walked into the barn, and stood with his head in his manger, hoping for a second meal. Pearl climbed down. “It is so bright up there—fantastic!”

I switched off the lights and led Pearl back to the house along the triplex cable. I pointed at the dryer outlet. “Unplug this if an inspector comes. I will install poles and hang the wire when we have money.”

Pearl was reassigned to an earlier shift by the post office. Now I drove Pearl to the ferry, did the morning chores, and left the island an hour later than she did. At night, Pearl arrived home first, did the evening chores, prepared dinner, and picked me up in the truck an hour later. Our long joint commutes stopped, and, little by little, distance began to creep into our relationship. Neither of us realized how important our commutes had been; there is nothing like sitting together and talking for two hours every day to keep a couple together.

We bought two tons of hay from Fernie, as Gus had suggested. It was more than we needed to feed one horse, two goats, and four sheep over the winter, but our prospects for boarding another horse looked good. Alan, Rose, Pearl, and I spent a day at hard labor loading the hay onto our blue truck—three overloaded truckloads of it—hauling it home from Fernie’s, and hoisting each bale into our hayloft using a block-and-tackle. Pearl and Rose pulled the rope from the ground while Alan and I took turns in the truck and the loft hooking the bales onto the rope and stacking forty 100-pound bales.

Pearl and I drove to the General Store to buy some groceries.

Pearl browsed the bulletin board notices. “Look at this: free kittens.”

We drove to see the litter. Two kittens were left, a gray tom and a tabby female with the deformed tails typical of inbreeding.

“Shall we take both? We’ll keep them in the barn, away from Whisky. They’ll get warm milk and will live in the hay. They will have many animal friends. A barn is cat heaven.”

1985: Adventure

I agreed. “Let’s take the male. We don’t want to make two ferry trips to the veterinarian and pay hundreds to sterilize the female kitten.”

“But a single male cat will disappear, so it is better to have two and just give their kittens away.” We took both kittens.

When I came home from work, Pearl wasn’t waiting at the ferry terminal to pick me up. I waited until most cars had disembarked, then hitchhiked home. Our truck was by the house. I changed and went to the barn. The lights were on, but only the goats and kittens greeted me. The milking kit sat next to the sink. Mouse and Pearl were missing.

I did the chores, ate dinner, and waited. Half an hour later, Pearl stormed into the house.

“Where were you?” I signed. “Where is Mouse?”

“Mouse is in the barn. I arrived home, changed clothes, prepared the milking kit, and went to the barn. Mouse was gone! I walked down to the lake to look for him, holding the flashlight in front of my face, scanning the beam left and right, looking for eye reflections. I saw deer eyes from across the lake but no horse eyes. I walked along the lake trail to the road and along the road toward the Building Centre.” “*Mow ... Mow,*” Pearl said. “I called Mouse’s name. Half an hour later, I reached the big house with grass. Mouse was standing there, his eyes shining in the beam, grazing! I held his halter and walked him home. Two kilometers each way! The flashlight batteries died, but sometimes cars passed us and lit the way. The moon turned the road into a ribbon under the stars. It was beautiful, but I hate walking in the dark because the world ends at the edge of the light. Then, I am deaf *and* blind. I could have been raped walking alone. We have no fence—and you want to board a horse!” Pearl put her face in her hands and sobbed.

I put my hands on her shoulders. She looked up, recovered, as if nothing had happened. “I have blisters. Gumboots are bad for long walks. We must finish the upper fence soon.”

The telephone rang. It was Gus.

“Ludd called me. He’s got the only lawn on the island, and Mouse was walking on it, eating it, pissing on it, and shitting on it! If it happens again, he’ll come after me for money, and I’ll come after you for money,

1985: Adventure

and no one's ever gonna board a horse at your place. Electrify that string! Leave a radio on! Leave a light on! Finish your fence! *Unnerstand?*"

Now that the barn had power, we replaced the temporary orange twine with a temporary electric fence. No horse escaped again.

Pearl and I registered Trout Lake Farm as a partnership and opened a Trout Lake Farm bank account. I set up accounting for our business in Lotus 1-2-3 in a Hyperion PC borrowed from my office, one of the first portable computers. It fit in a suitcase, weighed 8 kilograms, had two floppy disks, and cost \$5,000.

"One credit for \$150 from Gus and 54 debits for \$2,000 for feed, farm, and tools. Most will be refunded in tax, and then it's all profit."

"I don't understand 'debits' and 'credits.'"

"Debits go on the left, and credits on the right. You told me you helped your 'Vancouver Area Centre' with accounting."

"We didn't use debits and credits, only lists and amounts. I want you to teach me accounting and PCs."

"I will. But I'm still learning PCs, too, so let me figure it out first."

My MBA classes resumed in the fall. Pearl insisted I continue, despite the distance to the university and our never-ending projects on Bowen. To prepare for my encounter with Frank on the first night of the term, I brought the photo album of his work, but he had dropped out. My classmates were astonished when I passed the photo album around.

It was impossible for me to go home on class nights, except on the expensive water taxi, so twice a week my sister supported me by lending me bedroll space on her living room floor, and Pearl supported me by doing double chores.

As the days grew cooler, the spiders multiplied. We developed the habit of holding an arm in front of our face while walking to the barn to break the cobwebs that the spiders had erected overnight—the "Bowen Island salute." Mushrooms appeared, disappeared, and reappeared overnight. The fragrance of field and forest, the aroma of hay, creosote, horse sweat, and manure—we loved all of them. They put our downtown work and study into perspective.

Never did Pearl or I need to encourage the other to do chores. Even

in the rain, we enjoyed walking up the hill and down to the barn and climbing the ladder into the loft, breathing lungfuls of crisp air, and enjoying the companionship of our animals. We looked forward to offering carrots to the horse and banana peels to the goats. We loved surprises like a deer in the field or an eagle circling overhead.

The barn cats were a delight. As soon as they learned that warm milk was associated with goats, they learned that jumping onto the milking stand was associated with blows to the nose, so they sat just out of our reach, their tails curled around them. We taught them to walk by squirting streams of milk into their mouths, raising the streams a little higher until the cats walked like Orwell's pigs, drinking milk. Sometimes we squirted two streams, one at each cat, slowly back and forth so that the cats bumped into each other while walking on their hind legs.

We ate cheese with every meal. We ate Greek *horiatiki* salads with cheese. We ate pizza, pasta, grilled-cheese sandwiches, and spinach-and-cheese pie. We made cheesecake. We bought Ragu pasta sauce by the case. Yet our refrigerator slowly filled with cheese.

"We need to buy a freezer," signed Pearl. "We can store cheese and meat. If we don't buy a freezer, then I want a washer and a dryer. I don't like sitting in the laundromat in West Vancouver with strange people."

The goats produced less milk as the days grew colder, and the tide of frozen cheese began to ebb. We bought the washer and dryer instead.

Oct:

Men Can't Be Trusted

Pearl brought our mail home from the post office box. A letter to me had been opened; it was the first time she had intercepted my mail.

"It's from my pen-pal in Madrid, whom I met in Mexico City. She helps me with writing Spanish. Why is the envelope open?"

"I opened it. I saw Spanish, so I asked a woman at work to translate your letter. The translation is in my bag. Your conversation is boring."

"What did you expect—a love affair by mail?"

"How can I know what you are doing if I don't check?"

"You can't know; you have to *trust*. Without trust, no marriage can

1985: Adventure

survive.”

“But so many men can’t be trusted.”

“I’m not them. Do you remember why Eugénie left? Trust was never a problem. I was not the problem. Our marriage died for her dreams.”

“Help me to trust. Every day, tell me what you did so I don’t guess.”

If Pearl had been hearing I would not have forgiven her for opening my mail, but because she was deaf I excused her occasional surveillance.

“Let’s buy another TTY for the office so you can call me at work.”

Pearl kissed me. “That will help, too.”

As winter approached, the air became rich with the scent of fallen leaves. The rain grew heavier, the darkness grew blacker, and the wind grew stronger. Pearl and I loved it. We never waited for the rain to stop before walking outside in our raincoats to do the chores. Crows screamed as they commuted from the mainland to their Bowen Island roosts.

“Ugh,” Pearl mumbled in the kitchen. “Look in that oven mitt. I put my hands in mouse shit! The mitts are ruined. The cold weather is making the mice come inside. Please buy some mousetraps.”

I burned the mitt in the woodstove, drove to the General Store with Whisky in the back of the truck, and bought six mousetraps. I baited them with goat cheese and scattered them around the basement.

“We must keep Whisky inside our room tonight so he doesn’t try to eat the cheese,” signed Pearl.

“Good idea, but if he does try, he’ll only eat from one mousetrap.”

That night, as we lay in bed, I heard the crackles and pops of the woodstove punctuated by sporadic mousetrap snaps. In the morning, I reported, “Six pieces of cheese eaten. One dead mouse—the stupid one.”

At work, I browsed the Yellow Pages, called an exterminator, and ordered a Katch-All. A few days later, he delivered it to my office.

The exterminator placed a steel box on the reception counter and cranked the key on its side a few times. “This is the best trap ever invented. No bait, just wind it up. It will catch a dozen mice on one winding. Mice like to crawl into small places, so they crawl through this little tube. When they walk in, they get flipped into a cage, like this.” He touched the tube, the center of the trap rotated like a revolver cylinder,

1985: Adventure

and a new tube snapped into place, to the amusement of our staff. “You can release them or give them to owners of pet snakes.”

I brought the Katch-All home and showed it to Pearl.

“Good, and it’s safe for Whisky,” she signed. “I want him free to guard the whole house.”

That night, my sleep was broken by *kaching!* ... *kaching!* ... *kaching!* coming from the basement. In the morning, I carried the box upstairs with Whisky sniffing at it. Half a dozen terrified mice huddled inside.

Pearl and I did the chores. After chore time, we put the Katch-All outside the barn door and opened the lid. The mice scattered across the field at lightning speed, screaming; until then, I didn’t know mice could scream. The cats ran after one mouse, then another, but because the cats failed to focus on one target, all the mice escaped.

Each morning I carried the nightly collection of mice to the barn and released them, to the delight of the cats. The survivors never returned to the house, and in a week, the Katch-All was silent.

Pearl brought home a book: *A Pictorial History of Boxing*. “I heard my great-grandfather was a famous boxer. I want to look at the pictures to find one that looks like my father.”

“You should ask your mother what she knows about him.”

“Mother will not discuss my great-grandfather. She doesn’t show my father’s birth certificate to me. She hides his background from me.”

“Did you ask your mother to see your father’s papers?”

The power failed. I lit the kerosene lamp, and we warmed our hands from it as the kitchen filled with the homey smell of kerosene smoke.

“I told you the police never decided *who* caused the accident.”

“Because it was an accident; therefore, no person caused it.”

“No. The police said Mother didn’t kill Father. But Mother doesn’t give me all his papers. So she is hiding something.”

“What do your brother and sisters know about this?”

“They’re not interested in my research. They accept Mother’s stories.” Pearl opened the bottom drawer in the kitchen cabinet and pulled out a Ziploc bag full of yellowed clippings. “This is all I have.”

“These are newspaper stories about that accident, nothing unusual.”

1985: Adventure

“Not if you understand them—think about *it*.” She jabbed her right little finger into the palm of her left hand to stress the word “it.”

“What do your mother’s parents think about it?”

“Grandparents always pray for me. I am alone in my conclusion.”

“I can’t believe your mother is a killer, but I will help you search for the truth.”

“Will you help me to find anything I need for my research?”

“Yes.” We kissed.

“Your kiss feels like shocks. I am worried about our relationship. We make love less often. I feel like you are in love with the house, not me.”

“Both. Without the house, there is no place for a family, and without a family, there is no need for the house. Maybe I should quit school.”

“Don’t quit. Your MBA will support the security of our family.”

Over the next two years, with Pearl’s unstinting encouragement, I would complete my MBA; I could not have done it without her support.

Alan rented Bowen’s only ram, rubbed ochre on its belly, and released it in the field. Within a few days, all the ewes’ rumps were the tell-tale red color. The satisfied ram was stuffed in the Volvo and returned.

There was no unneutered buck on Bowen to service the does. Ralph suggested we buy a yearling, give him a few days in the harem, and then make dog food of him. On a Saturday morning, I drove to the Fraser Valley Livestock Auction. The parking lot was a community. Tools, crafts, rummage—anything that wasn’t live—was sold off the tailgates of pickup trucks. But after driving so far and facing the same costly trip home, I found only one male at auction, and he was huge and stinking.

“Ain’t he magnificent?” a soft voice said to me. “Man, what is he *doing* here at auction? He’s a pedigreed Saanen. His name is Jonathan.”

I turned to the hippie. “How do you know that?”

“I checked his papers in the office. He’s in the Livestock Register.”

“He’s the biggest goat I’ve ever seen. Are you going to bid on him?”

“My doe’s in heat, but to buy one buck for one doe makes no sense.”

“How much do you think he’ll go for?”

“About \$200 at this time of the year.”

“That’s too much! I need a cheap buck for the does, then dog food.”

1985: Adventure

“There must be other goat owners on Bowen. You can rent him out. If you buy him, I’ll give you \$20 for him to service my doe today.”

The auction began. The auctioneer droned his patter as the animals were paraded before us. Goats followed the ducks, pigs, and sheep. “Thirty-five dollars! A-budabe-budabe-budabe-forty-budabe-budabe-forty-budabe-forty-forty-dollars.” A woman lifted her hand. The auctioneer nodded. “Forty!-Forty-five-a-budabe-budabe-budabe-forty-five-budabe-forty-five-budabe-budabe-budabe-budabe-forty-five dollars!” No one moved. His gavel came down. “Sold! *Forty* dollars.”

Then Jonathan was auctioned. After six bids, my bid of \$87.50 won.

“Cheap,” said the hippie. “You on for \$20 stud service?”

“I’ve never pimped before.” I backed the truck under the livestock chute, and while waiting, watched some of the lambs and goats that had just been sold having their throats slit in the parking lot by dark-skinned buyers. The gate opened, and Jonathan trotted into the back of the truck. The hippie grabbed his rope collar and tethered him to the center.

I followed his battered truck to his farm where our tax-deductible buck finished his \$20 job in two seconds, a rate of \$30,000 an hour.

Jonathan stank, but he was tame and made friends with Whisky, Mouse, and, intimately, with our two does. He never became dog food.

“Another wet day,” Pearl signed. “Water is pouring over the edge of the roof. We must clean the roof, but can we wait until the roof is dry?”

“We need to clean the gutters while the roof is damp. Dry cedar splits when stepped on. But wet cedar is slippery. We must be careful not to slide off the roof when we go up.”

After breakfast, we put on our farm clothes and water-resistant coats. Our overalls were riddled with holes from the barbed wire. We did the chores together, then Pearl held each goat while I trimmed its hooves with a baling knife and a rasp; trimming was easy when they were wet.

We filtered and stored the milk and went back outside in the drizzle. I set the stepladder in front of the house, where the roof was only one story high, and steadied it on the uneven soil while Pearl climbed up. I crawled up after her. We worked carefully in opposite directions around the edge of the roof, sitting and facing outwards with our feet in the

1985: Adventure

gutters. Scuttling sideways, like crabs, we pulled handfuls of rotting leaves, needles, and twigs out of the gutters and dropped them over the edge, creating a brown line on the ground all around the house.

Two hours later, we were reunited on the opposite side of the roof from where we began. We scuttled gingerly back around the eave to the point over the stepladder where we began. I held Pearl's hand as she cautiously lowered a foot over the eave and set it on the top of ladder. Gripping the gutter with the other hand, she put her other foot on the first step of the ladder, stood on it, and started to climb down.

The ladder buckled and collapsed. I looked down helplessly as Pearl crashed on top of it. She lay on the ladder on her back, motionless.

After a minute, she signed, "I broke my hip. Come down. Help me."

"How? I'm trapped on the roof. Check your spine—try to wiggle your toes."

"Jump down. Help me. Help me, please. Please!"

"I'll break my legs! How will that help you?"

"If you love me, come down and help me."

"I can't! You need to go to the phone and call for help. We could sit in the rain for days before anyone comes, and die of cold."

Pearl glared at me.

"Maybe I could smash the skylight and fall onto the bed. The ladder twisted slowly, so I don't think your hip is broken. Wiggle your toes!"

Pearl rocked the tip of one boot back and forth, then the other. She rolled off the ladder, stood up, and threw her cap on the ground.

"The sawhorses are there. Drag them below me. Put some wood across the top. I will try to climb down on them."

Pearl did so, and I lowered myself onto the sawhorses, a dangerous maneuver from the slippery roof. We walked into the house and hung our coats and overalls on the nails by the woodstove. We were soaked to the skin, so radiant heat was the ideal way to recover. I added more firewood and opened the flue and grate. We stood with our hands to the stove, without communicating. When we felt warmer, we went upstairs.

Pearl sat limply in a kitchen chair and stared. "Why do you always have to be right? Being right adds stress to relationships."

I heard *fum—fum—Fum—FUM* thundering through the floor and

1985: Adventure

ran downstairs. The woodstove was red hot, and through its open grate, flames flashed yellow light on the woodpile. The chimney was chugging like a steam locomotive, its flue thermometer pegged to the end of the scale. The heat scorched our jeans. The sawdust on the dirt floor near the stove was on fire, ignited by the radiation. Pearl stamped out the embers while I shut the damper and grate. The stove groaned as it cooled. Pearl wiped the sweat from her face, her bruises forgotten.

“You could have burned down the house! Hearies are careless because they depend on hearing. Deafies do not make careless mistakes.”

Pearl’s prejudiced logic reversed cause and effect. Because she could not depend on hearing to save her, she could not *risk* being careless; it did not mean she would never *be* careless. We had just made a careless mistake together, and my hearing had saved our house.

We worked with enthusiasm on building up our business. We joined the Fraser Valley Goat Breeders Association and the Bowen Island Horse Owners & Riders Association and we subscribed to *United Caprine News*, the *Gait Post*, and *Countryside*, all in the tax-deductible name of Trout Lake Farm. We learned to vaccinate. I stained a plank with creosote and engraved it to make a signboard, and we proudly nailed it to our fence by the trunk road:

TROUT LAKE FARM
Horse Boarding 947-2574

My father arrived to help us build the upper field fence. Soon Eddie’s Case backhoe rumbled up the gravel half of the driveway. Father and I held each fence post in position while Eddie’s backhoe pounded it into the ground. A dozen poles hit bedrock, so Father taught me how to set these using Redi-Mix concrete and wooden braces. While the concrete cured, we built fence gates and corner braces, ready to support the wire. The upper field soon looked like a birthday cake surrounded by candles.

Then, rainy weekend after rainy weekend, Pearl and I strung barbed wire. Wearing puncture-proof gloves, we stapled the end of a roll to a corner post, rolled out the wire while trying not to shred our clothes, used the come-along to take up the slack, held a measuring stick next to each post, hammered staples loosely next to each marker, cranked the

1985: Adventure

come-along to pull the wire tight, and drove each staple home with one blow. We hung our work clothes by the woodstove at night, where they developed a smoky aroma like Lapsang Suchong tea.

When the barbed wire was finished, we nailed insulators to the poles and strung electric fence wire inside the barbed wire.

“When you drop nails on the ground, you can hear where they fall. It is easy for you to find them.”

“I can’t hear nails fall on the ground—the same as you.”

“My sisters could hear small things fall.”

“On a hard floor, not on soft dirt.”

When the fence was complete, I used the chainsaw to trim the fence posts to the same height. After that finishing touch, Pearl opened the barn door. Mouse and the goats walked out, cantered about, and grazed.

We brought Whisky to the field while we dismantled the temporary fence. He annoyed the goats, so we tethered him while we were busy. A few minutes later, I heard him yelping. Whisky lay on the ground curled up in a ball, his paws over his head. He cringed and yelped as the goats butted him. Pearl and I howled with laughter as we pulled the goats away and untied Whisky. The dog never bothered the goats again.

Our first copy of *Countryside* magazine arrived. Pearl slid her finger over long sentences and unfamiliar words. The masthead read:

Homesteading: It’s not a single idea, but many ideas and attitudes, including a reverence for nature and a preference for country life; a desire for maximum personal self-reliance and creative leisure; a concern for family nurture and community cohesion; a belief that the primary reward of work should be well-being rather than money; a certain nostalgia for the supposed simplicities of the past and an anxiety about the technological and bureaucratic complexities of the present and the future; and a taste for the plain and functional.

For a magazine about the simple life, its masthead was surprisingly complex. Its articles were more straightforward, such as:

Earning cash beyond the sidewalks

How to knit socks

How to give a goat an injection

Four ways to make compost

Wood heating never felt like a chore. On frosty mornings, before

1985: Adventure

chores, one of us got up, put on a cold quilted lumberjack shirt and a cold pair of jeans, and added firewood to the embers in the woodstove. The colder the weather, the greater the pleasure in tending the woodstove. It would burn for 12 hours, keeping the house warm until we arrived home from work to repeat the second half of our circadian cycle. We were homesteaders only in the modern-day usage of the word.

Nov: Rotate Windows, Get Married

“It’s not raining, but water is running down the walls.”

I looked at the windows. “Frank installed half the windows upside down! So half the drains are at the top instead of the bottom, and we have to pull the siding off the house, remove half the windows, turn them around, put them back in, and reinstall the siding. Many windows are two stories high—we can’t do it ourselves. But we have to fix them now, or the walls will be damaged. Ross didn’t see this problem because it was summer when he came.”

“Remove the windows in winter! I am so pissed off. I have to sort mail so we can build a house twice. Meanwhile, I get older.”

Ross was busy with other work, so I called Jesse, who Rokus had recommended. Jesse arrived with his dog, tied his hair in a rubber band, rolled a cigarette, and followed Pearl and me on a tour of the house. We looked up at the windows on the two-story back side of the house.

“No one ever hired me to rotate windows. I’ll need scaffolding. While I’ve got the scaffolding up, I should install your missing soffits and siding or else you’ll have starlings in your attic come spring.”

We agreed on a price, and hippie Jesse set up shop in the unfinished west side of the house. He soon had more bad news.

“Frank didn’t stain your siding. I know he left it to you to stain the outside, but it’ll curl if you only stain one side of it. So while I’ve got the scaffolding up, I should remove the siding from your *entire house*, stain it on both sides, and put it back up.”

It was hard to imagine building a house more inefficiently than we did by trying to save money. While our siding and windows were

1985: Adventure

missing and plastic was stapled over the holes, the woodstove burned wood at a tremendous rate, and yet we still felt cold. The house was cold when we woke up, cold when we came home from work, and barely warm when we went to bed. We began to wear T-shirts to bed instead of sleeping nude, and we brought our next-day's clothing into bed and slept next to it to pre-warm it. The bathroom became our haven for warmth, relaxing, signing, and reading. The baths we took together grew longer to delay walking out into the chill, but, gradually, Pearl started getting in after I got in, to let me warm up the bathroom first. Little by little, I started getting out before Pearl got out, for there were many tasks for me to do. Eventually, Pearl got in after I got out, recycling the hot bathwater like a traditional Japanese wife, and our baths together ceased.

Pearl rolled over in bed to face me. "You don't sign to me as much. You've changed. I don't know what you are thinking."

"Can you get day-shift again so we can commute together?"

"It's impossible because of union rules and my low seniority."

I lit the kerosene lamp and turned off the electric light. We preferred kerosene for romance—and I preferred it for reading *Countryside*.

"You have friends in the post office to talk to."

"We work with our hands, so how can we talk? We are only allowed to sign during breaks. Hearies can talk while they work. Deafies can't."

"You need to make more friends on Bowen Island."

"Few hearies want deafie friends. When I have a baby and stop working, there will be no one to sign to me until our baby can sign."

Today, it is hard to imagine the time when most people had no electronic contact other than a fixed-line telephone.

"You will make many friends when our baby goes to kindergarten."

Pearl rolled over, buried her face in the pillow, and wept. I took her hand. She squeezed it and rolled over to face me.

"I am lonely," she signed, tears dripping from her nose.

I ordered Whisky out of the bedroom. We made love. We fell asleep with our hands together in the I-love-you sign.

Stanley and Gertrude visited us, and we showed them our property. Then Stanley and I did the chores while Pearl and Gertrude cooked.

1985: Adventure

While we ate, Stanley said, "I would have shot Frank."

"I've dreamed of shooting Frank," signed Pearl.

"I don't want to go to jail. Maybe I should walk up to him now and then, and say, 'Frank, I've decided not to shoot you today.'"

"What gun have you got?"

"A Walther PPK."

I brought the gun from the bedroom and unloaded it. Stanley took a look at it and gave it to Gertrude, who was as disinterested in it as Pearl.

"I've never fired it," I signed and said.

"Unfinished basements are for sports, aren't they?" said Stanley.

So, after dinner, our basement became a shooting gallery. We put on coats and filed down the stairs, Whisky at our heels. Pearl carried a notepad and my .22 rifle. I carried the pistol and the ammunition box. Stanley carried a six-pack of beer and a bar of soap. Gertrude carried wine and two glasses. We filed past the woodstove and through the door in the temporary partition into the unfinished side of the basement. Two light bulbs hanging from the ceiling failed to pierce the Stygian gloom of the dirt floor, concrete foundation, wooden studs, and black tarpaper. I plugged a fluorescent light into an extension cord; the air was so cold that the tube flickered like a stroboscope until it warmed up.

Stanley stood a round of firewood on its end, for a backstop. He drew circles on a piece of wood and leaned it against the firewood. "Ten points for a bull's eye. Minus ten for hitting your motorcycle."

The shooter wore our chainsaw hardhat for hearing protection. The spectators, except for Whisky, had to make do by poking fingers in their ears. My turn was first; I aimed and fired. Whisky leaped behind Pearl and cowered in fear.

I took a second shot. "Everyone gets two pistol shots—it's a buck a round." I handed the gun and hardhat to Pearl.

Pearl aimed and fired twice, hitting two bull's-eyes. She was still an excellent shot. She handed the gun and hardhat to Stanley.

Stanley hit the target, then set the bar of soap in front of it and shot it. "See how the bullet pierced it? Soap cuts like flesh." Pearl grimaced.

He handed the pistol and hardhat to Gertrude, who took two shots. Then, we took turns shooting the economical .22. Dozens of brass

1985: Adventure

casings soon sparkled in the dirt. From time to time, we moved to the other side of the wall to warm up by the woodstove.

During one of our warming breaks, Stanley lifted an old *Utne Reader* magazine from the tinder pile and flipped through it. “Why don’t you get this for Frank?” He pointed to an advertisement for *Get Even: The Complete Book of Dirty Tricks*, by George Hayduke.

Pearl looked at the advertisement. “Why not? Frank needs to learn that what he did is not fair.” I remembered that the sign for “revenge” was one of the first signs Pearl taught me.

After we finished shooting, Stanley asked to play our piano. We went upstairs, took off our coats, lifted the plastic sheet covering the piano, and wiped the bench. Pearl put her hand on the piano, and Stanley played the first movement from Beethoven’s sonata, the “Moonlight.”

“Could you hear the music?” said Stanley.

“I could hear the music from watching you play.”

“You play well, and from memory, too,” I signed and said.

“I cheated. I played it in *F* instead of *E* because that key is easier.”

“I used to play a bit, but I stopped when Pearl moved in. It’s strange, but I didn’t feel like playing in front of her, while she couldn’t hear me. I didn’t stop playing my radio, because she had her TV. But TV and radio are passive, and it felt wrong for me to enjoy playing by myself.”

We ordered *Get Even*. It arrived a few weeks later. It was 200 pages of double-spaced, wide-margined trivia—a dirty trick. Pearl shook her head. “I know all these tricks.” We browsed the Paladin Press catalog that arrived with the *Get Even*. Other titles on offer included:

Eat Well for 99 Cents a Meal
Improvised Radio Jamming Techniques
Complete Guide to Lock Picking
Slash and Thrust
Home Workshop Silencers

I dropped the Paladin Press catalog onto the magazine stack and pulled out an issue of *Countryside* magazine. On the coupon, we ticked five books, which I mail-ordered:

√ Cheese-Making Made Easy
√ Raising Milk Goats the Modern Way

1985: Adventure

- √ Keeping Livestock Healthy
- √ Ducks and Geese in Your Backyard
- √ Small-Scale Pig Raising

“There is so much to learn,” signed Pearl. “Did you see the big tree at the top of the field? The goats ate the bark, so that tree will die. We should have put wire around it to protect it.”

“I will cut it down and chainsaw a chair into the stump so we can enjoy the view from our property’s highest point.” I did, and that stump became our favorite spot on the property. From our stump-chair, we could see the upper field and barn, the roof of the house, and, in the afternoon, sunlight reflecting off the lake and glinting through the trees.

I cut a tree for our first Christmas on Bowen and our second Christmas together. Perhaps that tree, its aroma, and its cheerful lights helped us to reach a milestone: although we had been engaged for a year, bought a house, and planned to have children, we had never set a wedding date. I thought recommitment might help Pearl to release any residual insecurity, such as the paranoia that caused her to open my mail. I also felt that if we didn’t keep our relationship moving forward, there was a risk that it might start to move backward.

In the glow of the Christmas tree, with glasses of wine, we sat down on kitchen chairs, the only chairs that weren’t covered in polyethylene sheets against the dust.

“We’ve been engaged for one year. Pearl, will you marry me on your birthday?”

Pearl kissed me. “I ask you again: When do you want children?”

“As soon as this side of the house is finished. A year, maybe a few months longer if Frank wins the \$10,000 we held back.”

“Why not marry after the house is finished?”

“Why should our wedding depend on construction? Also, that would be more expensive. If a couple marries at the end of this year, one taxpayer can deduct the other for the whole year and get a \$4,000 tax refund. This is the last time, because the tax rules change next year.”

Pearl thought about \$4,000, worth two months’ salary. “Our wedding day, my birthday, and Christmas Eve, all on the same special

1985: Adventure

day. I prefer not to invite Mother. She never supported my divorce.”

“That’s all right. For second weddings, couples can do what they want. We can keep it simple. The minimum is two witnesses.”

“Stanley and Gertrude, Rokus and Jenny, or Alan and Rose?”

“I will ask Stanley and Gertrude. I will try to find a Justice of the Peace to marry us on our property on Christmas Eve.”

“Under the Love Trees. Perfect!” Pearl signed the name sign she invented the night we became engaged. “*Pearl King* ... I love it.”

I called the Justices of the Peace listed in the Yellow Pages and eventually found one who would be willing to work on Christmas Eve. A few days later, we had portraits taken and drove to the home of the Justice of the Peace to plan the ceremony. She was startled to learn that the bride was deaf.

“I have experience with the deaf. You don’t need an interpreter, do you, dear? I know you can read lips. Can you read my lips, dear?”

“What?” signed Pearl, even though she had understood the woman

The Justice of the Peace leaned closer. “You *do* understand me, *don’t* you, dear?” she said rudely, a foot from Pearl’s face, breathing into it.

I was disgusted. Pearl pulled back. “What did she say?” she signed.

“Honey, either you read my lips or you pay for a certified interpreter—*if* you can find one at Christmas.”

Pearl agreed to lipread.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, the Justice of the Peace, Stanley, Gertrude, Pearl, and I stood under the Love Trees as the sun sparkled on the frost. Pearl and Gertrude wore their best dresses; Stanley and I wore our best suits. It could not have been a more beautiful day to be married, except that the temperature was just above freezing. We were married as quickly as possible, and we rushed into the house to thaw.

After toasts, we left for our two-day honeymoon. Alan and Rose cared for the animals while Pearl, Whisky, and I spent Christmas Eve in the Vancouver Bayshore Inn and Christmas Day with my parents.



Top left: The modern TDD that networked Pearl to the world of people who also owned a TDD.

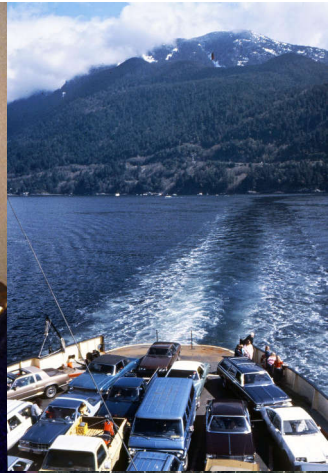
Top right: Pearl's father and Pearl in their teens.

Left: Pearl in her early twenties at St. Paul TVI.

Below: Virgil's alternative-lifestyle home and his cablecar access. I dreamed of living in such a peaceful place, but with electricity and road access.

Bottom: A Mexican highway and a Guatemalan bridge river detour like those we forded in 1984.





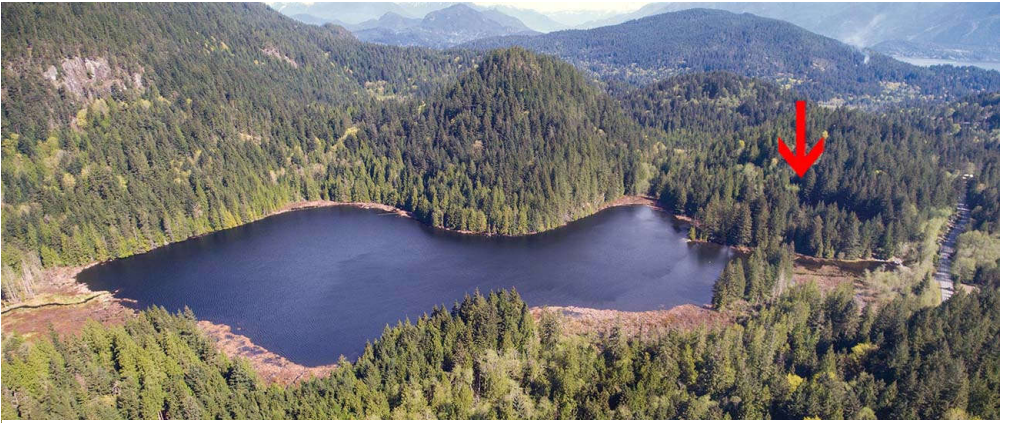
Above left: Our table with the home spreadsheet and wordprocessing technology of the day: paper, pencils, eraser, dictionary, calculator, and coffee.

Above right: The Howe Sound Queen. Right: Rokus's trailer home and pigsty. This was our introduction to Bowen Island's alternative-lifestyle dwellers.

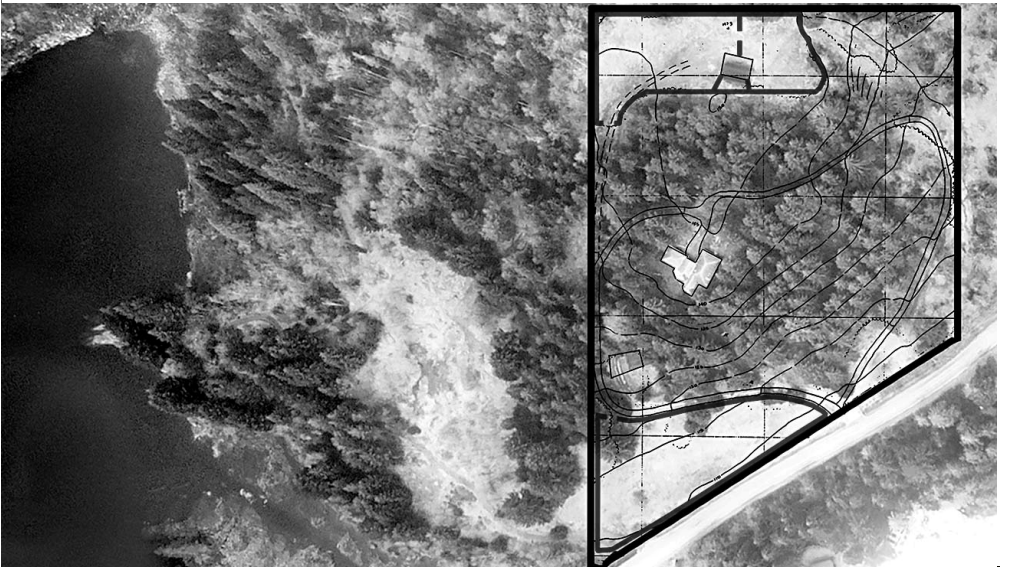


Left and bottom: Our future home seemed like it was hiding in another world. We couldn't stop talking about it and making what seemed to be hopeless plans to buy it out of foreclosure and finish it ourselves.





Above: Trout Lake looking northwest to Snug Cove. The arrow shows our land.
Below: Facing north, showing the lake, house, barn, property line, and fence plans.
Bottom: Our pickup and woodstove and the exciting progress of construction.





Above: Kieran and his deer, a special photo he never saw.
Left: Pearl, Whisky, and the twine fence that worked until Mouse discovered it wasn't electric and walked under it.

Below: Pearl feared the firewood when it rolled, but she never feared the chainsaw.
Bottom: Two of Schutt's swindles. It was painful to discover we had been cheated.





Above and right: Whisky and Mouse. We built Trout Lake Farm while most of the work on our spoiled house was suspended pending futile legal action.

Bottom left: Pearl signing, "Whisky was sad" next to our kerosene lamp.

Bottom right: Pearl's best friend, Jodi, with Mothergoat and Daughtergoat behind our first electric fence.





Above: Rose, with a Walkman, feeding sheep in the field we had fenced together.



Left: Pearl training Whisky, our protective and obedient German Shepherd dog.

Below: We covered the west wing and basement until we could afford to buy more windows. Climbing to the roof from a ladder to remove the leaves from the gutters was a dangerous semiannual chore.





Our wedding portrait taken in December 1985, while Pearl was in remission.



Above: Christmas 1985 with my family.



Left: Our office, where Pearl was a popular visitor and Nathan struggled with paranoia. I am at the back.

Bottom: Our first winter and spring. The four seasons were magical in their own way, and our lifestyle was just a one-hour commute to our jobs downtown.





Top, left: The animals in the barn delighted us every day. Right: The farrier arrived to shoe the horses.

Above: Pearl's photo of Rokus, Jenny, their first pig, and me.

Left: Tom, our butchered goats, the basement workshop, and the BMW.

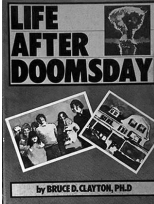
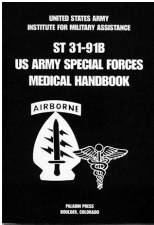
Bottom: A Bowen tourist attraction.



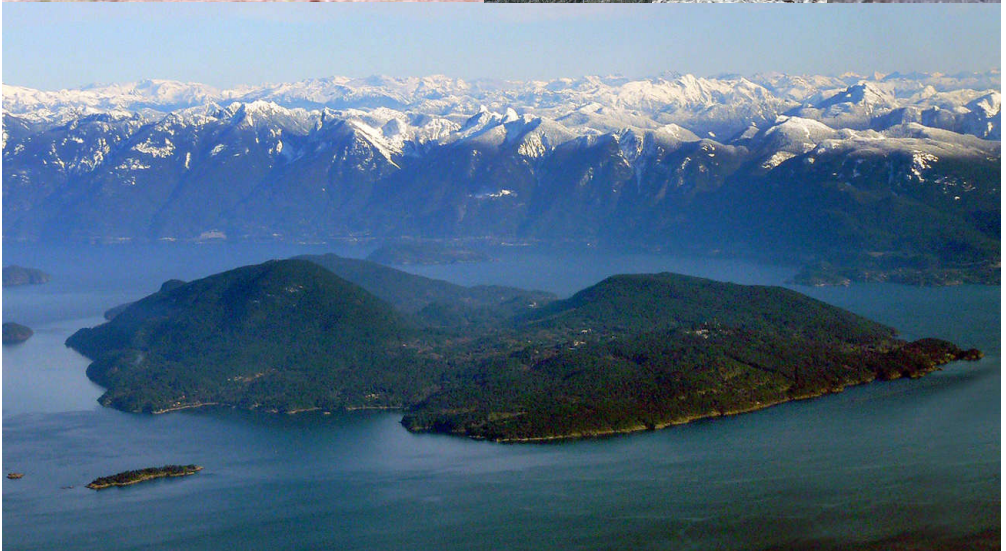


Top left: Christmas, birthday, and first anniversary in 1986.
Top right: Pearl returning to the house after winter chores.
Above: How Pearl broke her toe: our second batch of pork.
Left: Our new secretary trying her hand at goat dairying.
Below: Relaxing at my parents' home. Three months later, on 4 December 1987, Pearl called the police to arrest me.





Left: The Paladin Press books that terrified Pearl.
Above: The 2,000 kg “sabotaged” Oldsmobile and its frozen breakdown location at the end of our driveway.
Below: In 1988 I bid farewell to Whisky, Ralph, Adele, our animal friends, and wonderful Bowen Island.



Top: Pearl's 2005 letter to *Creatures All*, a Calgary magazine with which her artist sister was involved. After 17 years, I could barely recognize Pearl.

Right: Pearl spoke to the press in 2008 when she joined the class action lawsuit, but her stories kept changing and were inconsistent with everything she had said in the past.

Bottom left: Peoria Central Hall, the venue of her parents' first-trimester wedding reception. Here, Pearl's life direction was set before she was born.

Bottom right: Pearl's father and me in photos taken at about the same age. Perhaps Pearl's subconscious had seen childhood memories of her father in me, and so, at first, she trusted me.



Lions Foundation of Canada in Oakville, Ontario granted me my miniature poodle, Ollie, in November 1997. He was trained there for one year. Then Ollie and I were on training together for two weeks. After our graduation we flew to Vancouver, BC where I live.

Ollie will be nine years old on August 11th, 2005. He knows eight different signs. At Lions Foundation of Canada they taught him different sounds: doorbells, a clock alarm, knock at the door, fire alarms, microwave, etc.

I have a special registration I.D. card for Ollie and myself to use when we are in shopping malls, Safeway, buses - everywhere we go together. Ollie is a good and intelligent dog. I have other deaf friends who have hearing dogs as well. We usually meet together at Dog Park in New Westminster, BC where all the dogs enjoy playing together once a week.

SUN NEWS Alberta

Deaf students abused: lawsuit

Allegations include rape and beatings at Edmonton school

Wed, March 12, 2008

By **ANDREW HANON**, SUN MEDIA

Rape, humiliation, vicious beatings and even abortions are among the accusations in a lawsuit against the province on behalf of former students at Edmonton's Alberta School for the Deaf.

A statement of claim filed yesterday in Edmonton Court of Queen's Bench is the first part of a class action suit against provincial governments across Canada for alleged abuses committed in 12 special boarding schools for deaf children.



Former students of Edmonton's Alberta School for the Deaf are suing the Alberta government, alleging they were physically and sexually abused at the boarding school.



1986: Newlyweds

Jan:

Winter Wonderland

I went on a business trip. Pearl drove me to the airport and picked me up so I could claim mileage expenses. On 28 January 1986, I was working in our Toronto office when the space shuttle Challenger exploded.

I received an unexpected call. "This is Human Resources Development Canada, Monique speaking," said a French-accented woman. "You have heard of the Human Resources Development Canada Program for the Equal Employment of the Challenged, yes?"

I groaned. "Yes. We are not interested in another blind typist."

"I'm not calling about a blind typist. I am calling about a deaf clerk. We have a 25-year-old deaf man who has completed computer training. He talks and lipreads. I am sure you won't have trouble talking to him."

I almost fell off my chair. "Yes, I am sure I won't have any trouble talking to him."

"We pay half his wages. Try him for two months."

"I need an analyst for a computer project. What is his name?"

"Why do you want to know his name?"

"Because my wife might know him. She's deaf, too."

"His name is Nathan."

"Please call me back tomorrow."

Pearl knew Nathan, of course, because the deaf community is small. She had nothing bad to say about him, but she was jealous because she would never be offered a job in a bank using her brain; sorting mail was the best she could do. Both Nathan and Pearl had hearing parents who insisted on lipreading as per the norms of the day, but Nathan had been mainstreamed and had never attended a school for the deaf. His parents were rich, so he had grown up, assisted by oral tutors, among hearing children in the hearing world. Nathan was deaf, but Pearl was Deaf.

Nathan joined us in the office, and, at first, my colleagues liked him.

He was a deafie they could talk to and listen to, albeit with the hollow deaf accent which can never be trained away. And he gave Pearl someone to sign to when she dropped by the office.

But Nathan couldn't concentrate. He would look around every few minutes to see if anyone was talking, and, if so, he would ask what they had said when he wasn't looking. If I were around, Nathan would sign the question to me, but I usually didn't know what the others were talking about because I wasn't listening to them. Nathan took my ignorance to be evasiveness. His immaturity and suspicion disturbed everyone, so I discharged Nathan at the end of his two-month contract.

It was an interesting lesson, for I saw Pearl was happier in the deaf world than Nathan was in the hearing world, even with his oral skills. As an oral deaf man, it seemed that neither the hearing world nor the deaf world fully suited Nathan; neither accepted him as one of their own.

Another horse arrived at Trout Lake Farm. Wendy rode Senator, a chestnut quarter horse gelding, up to the barn. I engraved *Mouse* and *Senator* signs from cedar and hung them over their stalls. Mouse already knew his place, and soon Senator knew his.

Alan called. "Could you two please help us to herd the sheep to the barn for lambing? On foot—our Volvo is only now free of the sheep urine odor from last summer. If there are six of us, we can muster them on three sides and walk them up the gravel side of your driveway. We'll open the wire gate and let them into the upper field via that route."

Alan and Rose parked across the driveway, blocking it. I parked the truck at the top of the circular driveway to keep the sheep from walking back down the paved side in a circle. We opened the gate and walked into the lower field. The sheep huddled and moved away, bleating. Rose offered grain from a pail and tried to lead them out the gate, but they wouldn't follow, so we all moved behind the flock. They started walking away from us. Pearl and I stayed behind them while Alan and Rose herded each side, beating the ground with a stick each time a ewe stepped out of line. It took us half an hour, but our shepherding worked.

Pearl and I loved this life outside our front door because there was always something to discover, but inside our front door, Pearl surely

realized what was missing: children and a carpet for them to crawl on.

As I walked onto the ferry on my way home from work, I was surprised to see Stanley's GMC Suburban. I climbed in and sat on the blanket covering the holes in the seat. The truck reeked of mildew.

"What happened to your Mazda?"

"I got fired. I lost the truck, my salary, my credit card, and my perks. My boss was listening to my calls. He heard me say things like, 'Mrs. Rottweiler, you haven't made your card payments for seven months. I understand your husband was laid off a year ago, and you have to stay home with the children. That means you knew when you used our credit card that neither of you had a job—so why did you use our card, Mrs. Rottweiler? Can you work while your husband cares for the children? Have you thought of eating and drinking less so you can set aside money to pay your bills? Could you pay, say, ten dollars a month?' She told me that she'd had many collection agents call her, and she liked to talk to them—except me, from Eaton's. What was I supposed to say? 'That's fine, Mrs. Rottweiler, pay up whenever you like?' I'm now as unemployed as Mr. Rottweiler. Fortunately, our house is coming along. We've moved out of the trailer! Please be our first dinner guests."

Saturday afternoon, Pearl and I parked at the bottom of Stanley's hill. In the early winter twilight, we hiked up the access road. I carried a six-pack of beer and a bottle of Liebfraumilch while Pearl held the flashlight. The freezing dew made the asphalt slick, so we walked without signing, our gloved hands poised to break a fall. It was easier to walk on the gravel farther up. We walked past the dark trailer. Farther up the hill, light glowed from two windows in the corner of the house.

Gertrude and Stanley greeted us. Behind their front door, it was like a frozen dungeon. Sheets of plastic stapled to rows of studs defined the living room. Stanley walked to the plastic sheets. "Moses stretched his hand over the sea, and the polyethylene was divided!" With a flourish, Stanley parted the sheets, and we walked into tepid warmth. "We're only heating the kitchen and half the living room because our stove is too small to heat more space. But since we don't have a fridge, it's handy when the other half of our house is a walk-in freezer."

1986: Newlyweds

“Where do you sleep?” signed Pearl.

“On cots. We put them near the stove at night.”

Pearl was shocked; as dusty and damp as our bedroom had been, it was first-class accommodation compared to these Boy Scout conditions.

We took off our coats and slid onto the benches on either side of the kitchen table. We all wore thick, quilted lumberjack shirts. Stanley added wood to the stove and opened the wine and beer.

Pearl squeezed close to me for warmth. “I’m freezing.”

I put my hand on the window behind me. “The glass *is* freezing! Where on earth did you buy single-glazed windows?”

“I made them! I cut squares of glass and set them with glazier’s points. They’re cheaper than commercial windows.”

“Stanley, your heat is flying out the windows! You’ll never be able to heat this place with single-glazed windows. You’ll spend all summer cutting firewood. And these windows aren’t up to code, so you can’t get a Certificate of Occupancy, and you can’t get electricity connected.”

After eating beef-and-potato stew, Pearl helped Gertrude to clean up. Stanley and I walked outside, stood at the top of the stairs, and, under the stars, urinated onto the ground.

“Derrick, to understand what you see here, you need to know that I’m an undischarged bankrupt. When the garnishee order arrived, Eaton’s sacked me; Mrs. Rottweiler was their excuse. Now I, a debt collector, have no means to settle my debts, let alone finish our house.”

Pearl saw that although Frank had done a bad job and delayed us by a year, it was possible to do worse and for a wife to suffer more hardship with no end in sight. Frank had spoiled our house to make more money, while Stanley had spoiled his house because he had no money. The construction by Thaxter underneath Frank’s work was solid, but our best man and maid of honor were building an illegal, oversized shack.

A foot of snow had fallen during the night, and we awoke to a green-and-white winter wonderland. The view in every direction from every window was majestic. Pearl looked out at our clothes, frozen on the clothesline, and laughed; she said they looked like ghosts.

I walked to the barn to do the morning chores, savoring the fresh air

1986: Newlyweds

as the snow crystals sparkled. But the horse's drinking water had frozen, splitting the pails, so the horses were thirsty. No water came from the barn tap, also frozen. I fed the animals and walked back to the house.

"I never imagined Bowen Island could be so beautiful, but the barn has no water. The barn pipes need electric heat and insulation, a new project. We must carry water until the ice thaws—two pails, 15 kilograms each, twice a day. Carrying water will be difficult up the slippery hill in the dark. It's good we have hay and grain in the barn and firewood in the house because the truck can't drive up the road now."

"My uncle used to put 'mol—' in the water to keep it from freezing."

"Molasses. I read about that. Let's try it."

Molasses didn't work, so we carried water to the barn three times a day. Each day we watched the barn thermometer go lower: -5, -10, -15 Celsius. For weeks, we carried our groceries up the driveway in backpacks, from frozen pizza crusts and jars of *Ragu* sauce to cans of dog food. We walked flashlight-in-hand, or when our hands were full, flashlight-in-teeth, for winter commuting was always dark. Sometimes we slipped and slid down the driveway and slogged up again with snow in our boots.

Whisky loved the snow. When we threw sticks down the driveway, he would chase the stick as fast as he could, dig it out of the snowdrifts, then spin, kick, and slide while struggling to stop and turn around to run back up to us with his prize so we would do it again.

We felt grateful to live such exciting lives so close to nature—until Frank's construction tormented us again. A few days later, the pipes in the house froze, too. It was the third of Frank's three plumbing frauds.

"There is no water in the tap," Pearl signed one morning, livid. "Frank is preventing me from living like a woman!"

"Ross was right: the pipes froze because Frank put them in the attic instead of in the basement. We must heat the pipes, or they will burst and water will ruin the house. No water means no fire insurance, too."

Until I could relocate the pipes, all we could do was heat the house to tropical temperatures to try to thaw the pipes. We heated the house so hot that we could walk through it nude in the middle of winter, and our lips cracked from the desiccated air. After days of burning firewood at a

stupendous rate, water returned to our taps. The *Undercurrent* reported it was the coldest Bowen Island winter in a decade.

Mar:

Rich Couple's House

"Hello," I said to two newborn lambs on a Saturday morning. A ewe looked up from the straw, her fleece thick with lanolin, the greasy smell hanging in the air. I ran to the house through the snow, told Pearl, called Alan, and found my camera.

The driveway was impassible, so Alan and Rose parked by the trunk road and trekked up the snowy slope. Rose cleared the ewe's teats by milking with two fingers while Alan disinfected each lamb's navel by pouring tincture of iodine into a tiny cup, pressing it against the lamb's navel, and inverting the lamb together with the cup.

Alan took a strange-looking tool from his pocket. He put a tiny rubber ring on it and squeezed the handle to stretch it wide open. "This is an Elastrator, for docking and castration. It's said to be painless."

Pearl held a lamb while Alan pulled its tail through the tool and pressed a lever so that the rubber ring snapped tight. "The tail will fall off in two weeks. I'll leave this with you so you can castrate your kids."

I wrote to the minister who had married Eugénie and me in 1976. It summarized our situation and optimism:

4 March 1986

Dear Doug,

It was nice to get your letter. I'm sure you will always be a minister at heart, as was my grandfather.

Eugénie finished her MA and then moved out. We divorced. It was an amicable parting as these things go, but I resent having supported her for so long. She gave me a copy of Betty Friedan's book as a going-away gift. She changed her direction in life during the last two years of the M.A. (in English) program. Psychologists would say she changed reference groups. All of her new friends are divorced and proud of it and some are deliberately having kids without fathers. I try not to let it bother me. I prefer married life!

I remarried 2 years after Eugénie left to a beautiful and

1986: Newlyweds

intelligent woman. She is also divorced (her first husband was having affairs with married men.) Same age as me (32). Canadian, but her first husband was from Fargo, ND and she was living in ND about the time I got married there to Eugénie! Pearl is deaf, so I am improving my signing. We bought a 7-acre lot (woods, pasture, barn, and partly-finished house) on Bowen Island, a one-hour commute from Vancouver. I work at the bank, the same as before. She has a 2-year diploma from TVI in St. Paul as a medical lab tech, but could not get a job in it due to prejudice here. That was 7 years ago. The post office pays well (union) but it is boring.

Bowen Island life is fun. We board or own on our property 2 horses, 2 doe goats (both pregnant), 1 buck goat, 4 ewes, 3 lambs, 1 German Shepherd, and 2 cats (the cats live in the barn, the dog lives with us). We make money on horses and lambs and lose it on goats, but goats are more fun. 'Can't wait until the kids are born.'

I am working on an MBA at night school. Pearl wants to have kids (the human kind). I am ready for that now, especially with a first-class lady like Pearl.

Pearl can hear Morse code with headphones if the volume is high. I will teach her when we have more time. The hobby farm keeps us busy. It's hard not to be a believer in God when you walk to the barn through the forest in fresh snow and discover a newborn lamb, still wet, frolicking in the straw, looking for a warm nipple. It's great.

Two years ago we rode the BMW to Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico from here. No time for trips since. I try to finish the house. That's what's new in my life.

Best regards, Derrick

Unlike sheep, which lamb quietly at night, Mothergoat kidded on a spring afternoon, bellowing. She delivered one kid, a buck, instead of the usual two. Daughtergoat soon gave birth to two more bucks. We were sad not to have at least one doe for milk, only three bucks for meat.

The barn and its paddock were like a petting zoo, with eight lambs, four ewes, three goats, three kids, two horses, two cats, a kitten, and a dog. We were a family, and we loved it, not least because it took our minds off the house. Alan or Rose, often with their children, visited the lambs frequently even though Pearl and I had taken over all their daily

feedings in return for vacation relief. It was an ideal arrangement.

Virgil drove to Bowen Island for what would be his only visit, and we walked around the property. Pearl threw a stick from the woodpile over Whisky's head. He caught it as it whizzed past and dropped it at her feet. At Trout Lake, Virgil gazed at the vista and drew a deep breath. "You got a lake, and I got a river. You son of a bitch, man, this is great! Did you see that trout breach?"

We collected handfuls of fiddleheads, the curly fern sprouts which are the wild greens of spring, and walked back up the hill to our house.

"This is a rich couple's house. The windows face the sun, and the skylights face the stars," said Virgil. "Perfect peace."

Pearl pointed to the boarded-over windows in the unfinished west wing. "But wait until you see inside. We have peace, but I get lonely."

"But you work, don't you?"

"Yes, but I have few friends at the post office. They gossip too much."

"Most people, deaf or hearing, who aren't well educated don't have much to talk about, so they talk about each other," I signed and said.

Virgil took his vial from his pocket and passed it around. I would never cross a border carrying drugs, but Virgil was a risk-taker. "There was a guy on a motorcycle on the Bowen ferry. He had a BMW like yours but with a green tank."

"He lives at Eagle Cliff in a round house like a wooden yurt."

"Get to know him, Derrick—he's your neighborhood dealer."

"How do you know that?"

"His bike! The bugs were like a yellow-and-black paint job. I asked if he was coming back from Mexico, and he said only from California, but his bike was way too dirty for that, the way a bike gets if you are too busy riding to stop. I know he was lying to me."

"How do you know he wasn't on holiday?" signed Pearl.

"When he took off his helmet, he had no tan. There aren't many ways you can earn money doing things you like to do, like riding a bike."

"Great analysis. Would you like a tour? We'll pass his house twice because all roads on Bowen Island are dead ends."

We climbed into Virgil's pickup and sat three abreast. He popped a

cassette of Cuban music into the stereo, and I gave directions. We passed Stanley's driveway, passed the *For Sale* sign on the still-unsold Eagle Cliff lot that Rokus, Pearl, and I had hiked up a year before, and stopped on the road next to a round house. A lime-green BMW was parked in the weeds behind it.

"His house looks like an oil tank with a balcony," Pearl signed.

"The ground floor is windowless," said Virgil. "Derrick, you got to get to know this man."

"In summer, I'll ride here on my BMW."

After touring the island, we returned to the house. "Help us with chores. We need to castrate and disbud the kids before their horns start to grow. You're stronger than Pearl, so you can help by holding them."

In the barn, I took Alan's Elastrator from the feed room. "We are about to practice ancient life skills. Let's start by castrating."

Virgil took a joint from his pocket, lit it with a wooden match, and handed it to Pearl. "I like to smoke a joint before I castrate."

We passed the joint around, the first time Pearl and I smoked marijuana. I lit a propane torch and propped a piece of copper pipe over the flame. While it warmed, Pearl and Virgil cradled each kid while I pulled its scrotum through the rubber ring of the Elastrator, felt for both testicles, and released the rubber ring. The kids felt nothing, but after a few minutes, they hopped in circles, in some discomfort but not in pain.

"Next, we cauterize their horn buds. You hold the kids tight." I pressed the red-hot pipe onto one of the first kid's horn buds. Smoke curled up as it charred and the stench of burned hair filled the barn. The kid screamed as the other goats wailed in sympathy. The kid staggered around the stall, shaking its head, while we waited for the pipe to reheat.

"I'll go and cook dinner," signed Pearl, leaving the barn.

Virgil and I cauterized the other bud. The kid ran to its mother and suckled, now silent. We disbudded the other kids.

In the house. I opened beer, and Pearl served pasta with goat cheese.

"You steamed the fiddleheads perfectly, like asparagus," said Virgil. "Pearl, how do you like living in an unfinished house while your animals live in a finished barn?"

"I like it. Many signing deafies prefer a country life because city life

has too many complicated problems. Many oral deafies prefer a city life.”

“Problems? Like what?”

“Like when I went into an elevator. It stopped, but it didn’t open. I pounded on the door. Then someone tapped my shoulder! That elevator had doors at the front and the back, but I didn’t hear the back door open behind me, so the people behind me thought I was crazy. Or like when stores give you a number then call that number over the speaker. The deafie-hearie difference is smaller in the country, so life has less stress.”

We enjoyed an evening of conversation, drugs, and laughter. Virgil, my original inspiration for a country lifestyle, left on the last ferry.

Pearl and I boarded the Bowen Island bus. A man was reading *The Essential GK Chesterton*.

“That’s a good book,” I signed.

“Books are hard for me to read, so I prefer magazines.” Pearl took a newspaper clipping from her bag and showed it to me. It was an article about “gifted children.” “Were you like those children?”

“Not ‘gifted,’ just aloof. Maybe I was different from the other kids, because I didn’t connect with them. I was happier to play by myself.”

“Me, too. This story talks about a club called Mensa for intelligent people. You could make some new friends there.”

“Both of us can join. You solve problems quickly. You learned scuba theory easily. When we have to drive to many places, you see the shortest route. I am impressed by how quickly you spot the right solution to a problem. And that is one of the reasons I love you so much.”

I phoned Mensa in Toronto to discuss Pearl. They offered a visual test that was suitable for those with English as a second language. I was surprised to hear that I didn’t have to take any test to join because my GMAT and LSAT scores had both satisfied Mensa’s IQ requirement. I told Pearl about Mensa’s visual test, and she was excited to try it.

“I will take the Mensa test. I know I’m smart, but I hated my classes because I couldn’t understand my teachers. They just flapped their lips.”

“I often wonder what you would have been if you were born hearing and had had good teachers. My teachers were mean when I was young. I loved science. In grade four, my teacher did a chemistry experiment. I

1986: Newlyweds

said, 'That's an Erlenmeyer flask.' How many ten-year-old kids know that? Do you know what he said? 'You don't know how to spell it.'"

"I'm shocked! What will a child think about learning?"

"My mother told me a story about my grade six. There was a science project. I went back to the classroom after school to make it perfect. The teacher found me at my desk, working on it. Do you know what she said? 'What are you doing here! You're supposed to go home!' I smashed my project rather than submit it before it was perfect. I got zero for it."

I joined Mensa and began to attend its monthly drinks night, which were held in a bar near my office. The members were from all walks of life. The conversations were eclectic and lively, and I enjoyed them. Pearl registered for a visual test, and I looked forward to going together.

The days grew longer. As the kids were weaned, our milk and cheese production peaked. Pearl sold goat cheese to her colleagues. I sold it to my colleagues and to the delicatessen where I bought sandwiches. It was illegal to sell it, but at first we didn't know, and then we didn't care.

We bought electric heat tapes, pipe insulation, and automatic watering bowls, ending the toil of carrying pails of water when the barn pipes froze. We bought a chicken feeder for the cat food and filled it once a month. While I was spreading pasture seed with a Cyclone spreader, I heard the unfamiliar sound of a bulldozer operating on Thaxter's property, and I wondered what she was building there.

The farrier came to shoe Mouse and Senator. Pearl and I watched him pull the worn shoes from their hooves and heat new ones in the coke-fired forge in his pickup. When the new shoes glowed red hot, he pounded them to size on his anvil, reheated them, and nailed them to the hooves. I complimented him on his medieval blacksmith operation.

"I wouldn't do anything else. Coming here doesn't pay, though."

"So how do you earn money?"

"At the racetrack. The owner of a \$100,000 horse doesn't care about the cost of horseshoes." He handed the old horseshoes to Pearl. "For good luck. Hang them pointing up, because if they ever turn down, your luck will spill out."

Pearl and I rolled our shopping cart past a tall, handsome Native-Indian

1986: Newlyweds

man in a North Vancouver supermarket. “Hello,” he signed.

“Good morning,” signed the cheerful, blue-eyed blonde at his side.

Pearl and I were startled. “Hello,” we signed in unison.

“We sign because we have a deaf son,” signed the man.

“We like to meet parents of deaf children,” signed the woman.

“We have no children,” signed Pearl.

We introduced ourselves in sign language. The man’s name was Len George. His wife, Susan, was British. They said their deaf son was ten years old and was one of four sons.

“We live on Bowen Island,” I signed.

“My ancestors lived on Bowen Island,” signed Len. “It is beautiful.”

“We are having an Easter egg hunt for my deaf friends’ children. I invite your children to hunt for Easter eggs in our forest with the other children. We have goats, sheep, cats, horses and a dog. All the children can sign. It will be fun for your son!” signed Pearl.

“We’d love to come,” signed Susan.

While Pearl sketched a map to our house, Len and I exchanged business cards.

Pearl looked at Len’s card. “Your last name is a first name.”

“That’s not strange,” I signed. “Chief Dan George is a famous actor.”

“He is my father,” signed Len.

“I met him 15 years ago when he spoke to our high school class. I have his book, *My Heart Soars*. Are you an actor, too?”

“I do many things,” said Len, with a laugh. “I knew you weren’t deaf from your signs.”

“Don’t stop signing,” Pearl signed. “I’m surprised it took you all so long to figure out only I am deaf. We will see you on Bowen Island on Easter Sunday.”

When Len and his wife were out of sight, Pearl signed, “Their deaf son was born 20 years after I was born, so all his family can sign. I was born too early for Total Communication.”

I telephoned Len to let him know the ferry schedule. He said they would bring their car with them so they could drive around the island.

On Easter Sunday morning, Pearl and I hid chocolate eggs in the forest. After most of our guests had arrived, the adults played badminton

while the children hunted Easter eggs. It was a delightful day. But Len George's family never arrived, and we never heard them again.*

May:

Prairie Oysters

We were astonished to see a mobile home appear next to Trout Lake, an apparition barely visible through the trees from our property.

When I returned from work the next day, I saw a pink extension cord crossing our driveway, running from the lake to our house. Pearl was apprehensive.

"Whisky ran to the window, barking. A man walked backward through the forest, unrolling wire. When he reached our door, he knocked. I put the gun in my pocket. Whisky barked like crazy. I held him and opened the door. It was Wayne!"

Pearl handed me her notepad. It said:

"We need power for a few months. We will pay for it."

"I must ask my husband."

"Fran is developing her property around the lake."

"Derrick will talk to you."

"We need electric lights tonight."

"Wayne pointed to the power outlet by the front door. That's where he wants to plug in his wire. Then he left. You must say no! If we start to give power, it will be impossible to stop, and they will never pay."

I changed and put on my overalls. Pearl gave the gun to me, and I put it in my pocket. This was legal as long as we were on our property but not outside our property line. I dragged the pink wire back down to the mobile home. Their dog, Bear, was barking inside, but no one was home. I hung the wire from their trailer hitch and left.

A few days later we found surveyor's tapes nailed to our fence posts and the trees along our property line, so I called the police.

"Fran and Wayne are living in a trailer by the lake. A few days ago,

* Len was elected chief two years later. His deaf son, Isaac, would die at 30, of AIDS.

they asked to borrow power through a hundred-meter extension cord. Now, surveyor's tapes have appeared on our property line. What's up?"

"I can't tell you that. But I can tell you that Fran won the Bowen Island garbage collection contract a few months ago, because the bids were published in the *Undercurrent*. Her bid was, by far, the lowest. Did you happen to hear a bulldozer across the road?"

"Yes. I was wondering what they were doing."

"You know garbage must be trucked off the island, by law. You might guess that Fran has been burying Bowen Island's garbage on her property, just 200 meters from the reservoir, in breach of contract and against environmental laws."

"Might I also guess that our neighbors have become squatters?"

"Tell Pearl to relax; they won't be there much longer. The survey tapes around the lake and along your property are just a red herring."

"Fran once told us she owned the land all around the lake, but I checked, and of course she doesn't. But it seems she really believes it."

Pearl and I were keen to try our hands at turning piglets into pork. The initiative was mine, but I had Pearl's support because pigs can be profitable, unlike goats and sheep, which are more of a hobby. We set up a sty with an electric fence and automatic water, and we drove to the Fraser Valley Livestock Auction to buy piglets. Even though Pearl couldn't hear the auction, it was entertainment for both of us. The only piglets at auction that day were unneutered males, so we bid on two even though we would have to castrate them. The piglets were cute, and we carried them like puppies.

We drove the truck to the upper field, and each of us lowered a piglet into the sty. Before releasing them, we touched them to the electric wire to train them to avoid it, and we held their snouts to the watering nipple to show them where to drink. The piglets trotted happily into their shelter, our now-decommissioned outhouse lying on its side, and lay down to rest. Whisky patrolled the outside of the electric fence; he had already learned the hard way never to touch it.

Pearl and I went to the house with Whisky. In a twist of fate, the power failed a few minutes later, so we ran back to the sty. The clever

piglets had walked out through the disabled fence and were gone.

“We owned pigs for two hours. Our \$100 is walking in the forest!”

Pearl signed, “You can’t decide this now. You already did, right?”

“We didn’t decide the power failure, and philosophy won’t find the pigs. Let’s search in opposite directions. Take a can of grain with you.”

If they weren’t captured, there would soon be two feral boars on Bowen Island, with us to blame. We searched for an hour. Then we didn’t know what to do except to report their loss to the police.

“Laurent, it’s Derrick. The power failed an hour ago—five minutes after I brought two piglets home. With the electric fence dead, they just walked away.”

“Are they pink? Do they have four legs?” Laurent howled with laughter. “Thanks for calling. I’ll call you back if anyone reports them.”

The power came back on. We went out to search again and were astonished to find the piglets in the paddock, with Mouse and Senator, rolling in horse manure. We were thrilled when they allowed us to pick them up and carry them back to their sty. We were not thrilled that our clothes were covered in mud and manure.

I called Laurent back. “Derrick, you made my day! I love Bowen Island. I’ll rue the day I’m ever transferred to Toronto.”

The pigs never approached the fence again, even when the power was off. In addition to Buckerfield’s pig feed, we fed them the whey from our cheese-making. When we poured it into their trough, made from an old sink, the pigs competed with each other to drink it; they guzzled liters of it down in seconds. It was amazing to watch their pure primal greed.

We studied the castration procedure in *Small-Scale Pig Raising*. Today, YouTube shows how to castrate piglets, but we had to learn from black-and-white photos. It had to be done, without anesthesia.* Otherwise, the boars could have fought with each other and become aggressive, and their meat would have tasted gamey. The Elastrator couldn’t be used

*“On-farm anesthesia is rare due to economic, logistic, and safety issues for the pig and the farmer.”—American Veterinary Medical Assn, *Swine Castration* (29 May 2013)

because piglets don't have an external scrotum. We had to operate.

We put on our overalls and walked to the barn. The piglets had grown much larger during their first week with us; I realized we should have done the procedure as soon as we bought them. Pearl led the horses out of the barn and bolted the door. I carried a piglet in from the sty. It squealed as I picked it up, then settled happily in my arm.

"I will hold them. You operate," Pearl signed.

Pearl sat down on the milking stand, braced her back against the wall, and held the piglet on its back with its head in her crotch and a hind leg in each gloved hand. Our hands were full, so we couldn't sign.

As soon as I dripped tincture of iodine on its scrotum to sterilize it, the piglet started whining and kicking. Pearl's arms were no match for the strength of its legs, and there was no way I could operate on a moving target. We could not continue. Pearl put down the piglet.

"You operate. Paint the scrotum with iodine, cut with a scalpel, and yank the ball out. Repeat on the other side. Sprinkle some blood stopper powder. It takes seconds. Pretend you are a medical lab technician."

Now I held the piglet. Pearl's first cut was too soft, only lacerating, not cutting. The piglet screamed as I struggled to hold it. With each passing second, it became more difficult for me to hold it motionless because the piglet increased its efforts to escape while my arms tired.

Her second cut exposed a testicle like a white chestnut. The pig *shrieked*—the sound inside the closed barn was louder than anything I'd heard before. Pearl heard it, too; she glared at me, pulled out the testicle, threw it on the ground, and held up her hands to show me they were trembling. She excised the second testicle with one cut. She sprinkled blood stopper powder on the wound, and the piglet stopped screaming. I released it. It grunted, trotted about the barn, walked to the watering nipple, and drank. It seemed to have recovered. I returned it to the sty.

Pearl was crying when I brought her the second piglet.

Jun: Like Shooting Pigs in a Sty

Rokus looked in the barn door while Pearl and I were doing Sunday

1986: Newlyweds

morning chores. “Good morning! Could you two give us a hand next weekend? Our piglets have grown up. We bought ours three months ago, so we have 200 kilos of pig already. Do you own a gun?”

“A 12 gauge shotgun, a .22 rifle, and a .32 pistol—take your pick.”

“The .32 sounds good. A .22 will bounce off their heads, and a 12 gauge will blow off their heads. Bowen Island has been closed to the discharge of firearms, but two shots an hour apart won’t be a problem.”

When Pearl and I arrived for the slaughter, a fire was crackling under a steel drum of steaming water. The drum stood on a double row of bricks in front of their home. Rokus and Jenny came out to greet us.

“When they were small, I walked one to school for show-and-tell,” said Jenny. “We have two because two grow faster than one. They ‘hog the food’ and ‘eat like pigs’ to keep the food away from the other pig.”

Rokus came out and walked to the sty. “Take your pick. The first pig should be an easy shot, but the second pig will be terrified.” Rokus dropped a handful of grain on the ground next to the fence. I fired straight down into the center of the closest skull. Behind a cloud of blue smoke, the pig screamed and staggered from side to side, blood pouring from its jaw. Its screaming could be heard for miles.

“Pathetic!” Rokus was furious that the pig was suffering. I gave him the gun. He jumped over the fence and shot it again. It collapsed and began its death throes.

Rokus’s neighbor walked over. “Two shots for one pig?”

“Give us a hand,” said Rokus. He, his neighbor, and I dragged the carcass through the mud to the drum. Rokus stabbed both hind trotters and pushed a pipe through them. Jenny and the neighbor steadied the drum while Rokus and I each gripped an end of the pipe and hoisted the pig into the air. We lifted our arms like surrendering soldiers, but we couldn’t raise the carcass high enough for its head to clear the drum. Pearl wasn’t sure how to help, so she took photos. We lowered the carcass to the ground. Rokus asked his neighbor to bring his backhoe.

His neighbor walked back to his house, and, in a few minutes, we heard the roar of a diesel engine. His neighbor returned in his vintage backhoe, and Rokus hooked the pipe over its bucket. The machine hoisted the carcass into the air and down into the drum. After about five

minutes, the backhoe lifted the carcass from the drum and onto a bench. Rokus scraped the steaming pink carcass with the back of a knife. "Not long enough." The backhoe lowered the carcass back into the water and, after a few minutes, lifted it out again.

Rokus scraped it again. "*Godverdomme!* The water's not hot enough to scald the hair, but it's hot enough to cook the meat!" He went to the shed and returned with a Bernz-O-Matic propane torch. The neighbor turned off the engine and left the pink torpedo hanging in the air. Rokus burned the hair away, giving off a horrible stench. He honed his butcher's knife on a sharpening steel, stepped back, and planned his first cut. He sliced into the neck to bleed the carcass, and blood poured onto the ground. When the bleeding stopped, he rolled a wheelbarrow under the carcass. He slit it open from neck to crotch, then handed me a piece of string. "Cut around the anus. Tie it shut, so feces don't slide out."

Rokus taught me an ancient skill lost to those who eat supermarket meat. It was the first time I had gutted an animal. Rokus scooped the entrails into the wheelbarrow and tossed the spleen to his dog.

"It's like cleaning a giant fish," signed Pearl.

"Yes, except that we have to be much more careful not to soil the meat. You can easily rinse a fish, but it's hard to rinse whole hog."

Rokus unraveled the intestines from the pile of guts in the wheelbarrow, squeezed out the offal, ran water through them, turned them inside out, and rinsed them again to save for sausage casings. He cut out the heart and liver, removed the gallbladder, and lay the organs into the garden sink under running water. He sawed off the head, sawed the carcass in half, and rinsed the sides with a hose. We carried them into the shed and hung them from the rafters. We all took a break, then Rokus shot the second pig.

After the scalding debacle at Rokus's, we prepared carefully for the slaughtering and butchering we would do ourselves three months later. We bought a freezer. I bought a cast-iron bathtub from a scrapyard, a better solution to the scalding problem because the carcass could be lifted horizontally and the water could be heated electrically. The bathtub was so heavy it took four men to lift it into our pickup truck.

1986: Newlyweds

Halfway up the driveway, the tub slid back and slammed into the tailgate, bending it into a “V,” and almost smashing it open. At the barn, I used the come-along to drag the monster out of the truck and into its place by the barn.

When Pearl saw the damage to the tailgate, she was furious. “You carry a heavy load, and you don’t tie it with a rope? Are you an idiot? Look at our truck now! Bent!”

We ate dinner without signing. Pearl watched TV alone until bedtime, then she climbed into bed on her edge of the mattress, as far from me as possible. I turned off the light and put my arm around her shoulder. She spun around and punched me in the chest. For the first time, she had become violent—and over a minor issue. I pushed her away, jumped out of bed, and turned on the light.

“Hit me! Hit me hard! Come on, come on, I dare you! You don’t want to give me a bruise I can show to the police!”

Baffled, I could only stare at her.

Pearl relaxed and smiled serenely. “Are you going to hit me or not?”

“No.”

She lay down and closed her eyes. I turned off the light. I heard her breathing settle into sleep, and only then did I allow myself to sleep.

Morning dawned as if nothing had happened. I couldn’t understand why she had become violent and had then forgiven me, but I sensed that her overreaction was part of a bigger problem I didn’t understand.

On the last day of June, I stared at the ATM screen:

Transaction declined.
Insufficient funds.

It was the Monday after payday, yet my balance was zero. I rushed inside and was stunned by what the bank manager told me: the bank had received a court order to transfer all the money in our bank account to the account of a lawyer representing Frank Schutt.

I called Clifford. He said, “Frank will do this again unless you add a person who isn’t a party to the suit, such as your mother, to your joint account. Your problem is that there are more homeowners who don’t pay than there are contractors who don’t deliver. The system likes

simple explanations, but your only defense is arguing *quality*. He's got you because it is too expensive to argue quality. It will cost you thousands to defend your holdback whether you win or lose, money you will never be able to recover from his shell company. You have to pay him to get rid of him."

Pearl was furious when I broke the news. I apologized for hiring an amateur. I apologized for trusting Frank. I apologized for not taking the contract to a lawyer, or showing it to my father, who would surely have seen through it. But neither of us could accept that Frank was entitled to full payment; we were in denial. So we paid Clifford a \$1,450 retainer to defend Frank's claim, and we added my mother to our joint account.

Until the stalemate with Frank ended, we continued to avoid touching Frank's work. We improved the drainage in the upper field to avoid ponding. I installed gutters around the barn so the paddock would be less muddy. We had a power pole erected for the barn's electrical cable, lifting it off the ground where it had been lying for the past year. These improvements added value to the property, but they brought Pearl no closer to her dreams of having a family.

Jul:

World Exposition

Daughtergoat contracted mange, a parasitic skin infection. Over four months, despite dustings of rotenone powder, much of her fur had fallen out. She didn't appear to be suffering, but she looked awful. We were lucky that none of the other animals in the barn caught the mites, too.

"Is anyone is going to board a horse here when we have a goat advertising that we don't know how to care for animals?" signed Pearl.

After Rokus's pig slaughtering lesson, we felt confident we could slaughter a goat. The unfinished west wing of our home became our slaughterhouse. I honed the kitchen knife until it was razor sharp. Pearl milked Daughtergoat for the last time and walked her to the house on a leash. We hung her by her hind legs with a rope through a pulley tied to a roof truss. Pearl rolled the wheelbarrow underneath her as she swung gently, bleating softly. With one stroke I cut her throat exactly as the

1986: Newlyweds

goat book said to do it, and she passed out instantly. Her blood gushed out under such pressure that most of it missed the wheelbarrow and sprayed our future living room floor where the fireplace stands today.

Pearl pulled back the crusty skin as I separated it from the body with the knife. I eviscerated the carcass, and we hung it in the basement to cool. In the morning, working on our kitchen table, we chopped the meat into chunks, wrapped the chunks in plastic bags, and put them in our new freezer. Along with commercial dog food, Whisky would eat a piece of his former friend every day for two years.

The next weekend, I slaughtered the largest kid on my own. A kid was so much smaller than a goat or a pig that I didn't need any help. After hanging it overnight, Pearl helped me to butcher it and to wrap and label the cuts of meat.

I hung up the telephone and hugged Pearl. "Visitors! My friend Tom and his family are coming. They'll stay a week while they visit Expo '86."

"You didn't tell me about this person."

"He is a BMW-riding friend from Saskatchewan. You saw a photo of him with his wife and Eugénie. I haven't seen him in years. They are coming on two motorcycles, Tom, with his 15-year-old son, and his wife, with their 14-year-old daughter. They can take the water taxi from the cove directly to Expo. That will be fun for these flatlanders."

"You take them to Expo. I will go with Jodi. Then you don't have to interpret. Everyone can talk freely." This was true, but I felt disappointed that Pearl had little interest in accompanying us.

Our visitors visited Expo nearly every day, one day with me and the rest on their own. They loved Bowen Island. The children were fascinated by signing, especially by how Whisky obeyed sign language commands. They enjoyed writing to Pearl, and they loved the barn.

At dinner, Tom said, "What could be finer than living in a forest by a lake, working in a modern office, and commuting on the sea?"

"I think not working at all would be even better," signed Pearl.

"This is a treat for us after our view of yellow rapeseed fields on the prairies, as flat as far as the eye can see," said Tom's wife.

"Today I walked to the lake," said Tom. "I saw a naked woman dive

1986: Newlyweds

into the water! What a place you have! Don't ever give it up."

"It is our dream home, except for the problems with construction. It is safe and peaceful here."

"Peaceful? Surely, noise never bothers a deaf person."

"That's true, but I will tell you a story. A deafie was cleaning her house. When she got to the attic, she cleaned an old lamp. A spirit popped out and signed, 'You have three wishes. What do you want?' The deafie signed, 'Clean the house.' The spirit blinked, and the house was clean. He signed, 'You have two wishes left.' 'Give me hearing,' signed the deafie. The spirit blinked, and the woman could hear. 'You have one wish left.' 'Wait,' she said, amazed to hear her voice for the first time. She ran downstairs and shouted, 'I can hear!' She heard her kids fighting and yelling. She called to them, but they ignored her. She heard the TV blasting and her hearie husband's friends shouting and swearing as they watched football. She walked to the store and heard traffic, music from the ceiling, people, machines, everything! She went home and saw the house was a mess again. 'I wish for a peaceful house,' she said. The spirit reappeared, and she was deaf again. 'Thank you,' she signed. Sometimes it is better to be deaf."

Tom smiled. "By the way, did you know your kids are ready to eat?. They can grow larger, but more feed will cost more than more meat is worth."

"Shall we slaughter them tomorrow, together."

"I'd love to! My friend and I do a hog every year. We collect scraps from the Co-op and feed our hog for nothing."

The next day, while Pearl and Jodi went to Expo and Tom's family went swimming at Bowen Bay beach, Tom and I killed and slaughtered the kids. He knew exactly what to do, and I learned a lot from him. He skinned the first kid as neatly as if he were undressing it, letting the pelt unroll into the wheelbarrow in one piece. He slit the belly *upwards*, instead of downwards as I had been doing, and held his finger over the tip of the blade to avoid nicking the guts. I did the work on the second kid while Tom coached me. We hung the carcasses next to my BMW and I enjoyed a well-earned beer. Tom, a recovered alcoholic, had coffee.

In the morning, the six of us went down to the basement to view our

1986: Newlyweds

handiwork. Tom shone a light on the ribs, looked closely, and flicked a few white grains off the carcasses with the tip of his penknife. “Maggot eggs are probably a delicacy somewhere, but not to me. Don’t worry, they won’t hatch.”

While Tom and his family began their long ride home, Pearl and I butchered and wrapped the meat. We went back to Expo once more, and this time with each other. It was the last time we saw Tom’s family; he died six years later of a heart attack.

“Let’s whitewash the barn to make it bright. My uncle said whitewash is cheaper than paint.”

I bought lime and salt. We mixed a batch and whitewashed one horse stall. It looked good, and it was cheap. We admired our work and smiled.

“I told you so. Let’s mix some more and paint when we have time. Slowly, we will cover the inside of the barn.”

A few days later, at work, my secretary shouted. “Derrick, telephone, quick!” I picked up the telephone and heard a noisy radiotelephone connection. “This is the Bowen Island Water Taxi. Your wife is on a stretcher. The ambulance crew is bringing her to Lions Gate Hospital. She’s blinded herself with whitewash.”

I was horrified—deaf *and* blind? I borrowed my boss’s car and rushed to the hospital. Pearl lay on her back on a gurney, her eyes closed, wearing gumboots and whitewash-splashed overalls. Her clothes were soaked.

A paramedic held a bag of saline solution over her head and was dripping it into her eyes. “She is deaf, isn’t she?”

“Yes. How is she?”

“We don’t know because we haven’t been able to open her eyes.”

Pearl’s hand was so strong from milking goats that it clamped mine like a vise. I kissed Pearl on her salty lips, and she relaxed. She raised her other hand, her eyes still closed, and signed, “I love you.”

“The doctor will see her now,” said the nurse, wheeling her away. I took care of the admission paperwork while Pearl was being treated.

The doctor called me into the examination room. Pearl lay with her eyes open, but with a plastic tube sticking out of each one, so she

couldn't see anything. Each tube ran to a bag of saline solution hanging over her head.

"We'll leave the irrigation contacts in for an hour. Please tell her what I said." I fingerspelled on Pearl's hand. "Her corneas look undamaged, but it's too soon to say. No eye protection! If you lost your eyes, it would be tragic, but if she lost hers it would be a catastrophe!"

I held Pearl's hand for an hour. The doctor removed the contact lenses, examined her cherry-red eyes, taped patches over them, gave me a bottle of eye drops, and told me to remove her patches in the morning. For one night, Pearl was deaf-blind. I helped her to her feet, guided her to a toilet, and helped her to use it. Our journey home took more than an hour, and all while she was soaking wet. I undressed her, washed her, fed her, and put her to bed.

I changed and walked to the barn in my overalls. The horses stood outside the barn and pawed the ground, thirsty and hungry. The doors were closed. Inside, the area around the sink was wet from when Pearl had rinsed her eyes. A pail of whitewash stood on a whitewash-splattered ladder, and a brush lay on the floor. Strangely, there was no whitewash on the wall. I looked up and saw that the ceiling around the light had been whitewashed. The woman who "never made careless mistakes like hearies" had been painting directly over her head without any eye protection. I cleaned up the mess and did the chores.

In the morning, I removed Pearl's eye patches. Her eyes and eyelids were red and swollen. She sat up. "I see you through a fog. I can't go to work today."

"You were lucky. How did you call the ambulance?"

"I stumbled to the house. My eyes were on fire. I had to feel the number-holes on the telephone dial. I dialed 911. Then I talked." Pearl muttered in her hollow voice, "*Elp ... 'o-oor ... 'ole 643 ... I am 'eaf ... 'elp ... 'o-oor ... 'ole 643 ... I am 'eaf ...*" She signed, "I hoped someone was listening. I didn't hang up, so they can find me. I talked and talked. Whisky barked when they came. I held his collar and walked to the door with my eyes closed."

Pearl's eyes healed quickly. She never painted again without goggles.

The incident made us talk about future emergencies. What if she had

another accident? What if the house caught fire? What if there was an intruder? I bought a Radio Shack dialer and programmed it to call the police, fire department, and ambulance with one push of a panic-button. The cassette would play: “*This is an emergency. Pearl King is calling from Trunk Road pole 643. I am deaf. I need help. This is an emergency.*” We kept it in the bedroom. I hoped she would feel safer with this machine.

In August, we ordered hay for our livestock and for resale. I ordered a semi-trailer full, 150 bales, seven tons. The hay company used a motor-escalator to haul it up into our hayloft. Now that we had plenty of hay and a freeze-proof water supply, we built bridle racks and saddlehorses in the tack room to be ready for four horses and a hitching post, too.

To make the saddlehorses, Pearl fed planks into the radial arm saw while I guided them through the screaming blade. I milled the edges with a router while Pearl swept the chips into paper bags to burn as fuel.

Pearl pointed at the Black & Decker Workmate, a woodworking vise. “Where did you get that tool?”

“Father left it here for me after we made the barn doors.”

During dinner that evening, Pearl signed, “You bought that tool with our money.”

“It’s my father’s tool. We are borrowing it.”

“You are spending our money secretly! Admit it!”

I was astonished by her distorted perception of reality and by her aggressive confrontation. “Call my father through the MRC. Ask *him*.”

Pearl sneered. “You lie! Your father will repeat what you said because you already told him to tell me that. You lie! *You lie!*”

It was her first accusation of treachery since she lent me her car two years ago. I went out into the gloom of the unfinished west wing and brought the well-worn Workmate into the kitchen.

“Look at it. Is it new?”

“You made it look old. You made it look like that!”

“You talk like Frank talks. Why are you arguing about a stupid tool?”

“Because you lie to me! *Fuck you!*” She glared at me and gave me her “middle finger” the deaf way, horizontally instead of vertically.

I lost my self-control. I grabbed her by the shoulders and screamed,

“It’s not my fucking tool!”

Pearl held out her hands to show me they were trembling. “I’m shocked!” She put her hands on her face. “My face is hot. I know you wanted to hurt me. Tonight I will sleep alone,” she signed calmly, suddenly tranquil, as if nothing had happened.

At bedtime, Pearl pulled the plastic sheets off the sofa and, for the first time, slept in the living room. I listened to the rain on the bedroom skylight and wondered what had happened. I was alarmed and confused. I couldn’t see a pattern in her shifting behavior; I only saw episodes, and I rationalized each one.

Sep: Alberta School for the Deaf

“We need a vacation,” signed Pearl. “Alan can care for all the animals.”

“You are right, we do need a vacation. Where do you want to go?”

“Alberta by motorcycle. I will show you where I grew up. We haven’t ridden the motorcycle since Mexico. I love the way people stare when we climb off your big black motorcycle in our leather suits, and then we surprise them by signing.”

We took a holiday to visit Pearl’s sister Debbie and her husband and son, her sister Carol, her brother Kevin, and a few deaf friends. Although we visited all her aunts and uncles on her mother’s side during our years together, we never visited any on her father’s side. Her deaf friends usually signed very swiftly, so I often spent my time speaking to her friends’ hearing children. Most nights we saved money by sleeping in our sleeping bags on our hosts’ living room floors.

We visited her uncle’s ranch in Cochrane, in the Rocky Mountain foothills. His dogs snapped at the motorcycle as we rode past a horse trailer and up to a white-and-blue mobile home at the end of a gravel road. Smoke drifted from its steel chimney pipe. We dismounted beside a red Dodge pickup truck; firewood, timber, a come-along, a shovel, and a bucket of wrenches lay in the back of it. Farm equipment and scraps of steel were scattered about. Barbed-wire fences led to the horizon.

I took off my gloves. “This property is huge!”

1986: Newlyweds

“Here is where I spent my summers, playing with animals and helping my uncle do chores.” Pearl was smiling, so happy to be back.

The sliding door on a homemade wooden deck opened. A tall, handsome, rugged man with a tanned face and a cowboy’s mustache beckoned us into his home. He hugged Pearl long and tenderly.

“Pearl! I’m glad you could make it,” he said. Like the rest of Pearl’s family, her uncle, Ernie, used only oral communication. Ernie and I introduced ourselves. We took off our boots and went inside.

Ornate cowboy boots, well-worn workman’s boots, and mud-covered rubber boots stood in a row inside the door next to a boot-jack welded from old horseshoes. The cozy living room was decorated with glittering trophies and photographs of draft horses. We took off our leathers while Ernie tossed pieces of firewood and the butt of his hand-rolled cigarette into the stove and he drained his percolator into coffee mugs.

“I never saw so many horses. Hills and horses as far as the eye can see. How big is your land?”

“It’s 160 acres.” I had never been on such a large property.

“How many horses do you have now?” signed Pearl.

“Five hundred, plus six Belgians. I race my Belgians in the draft horse competitions in the Calgary Stampede every year. I do hayrides at the Stampede, too.” Ernie showed us his many trophies. I liked Ernie.

“Five hundred! But what do you do with them all?”

“He raises and sells them,” Pearl signed.

“This is about as close as you can get to Marlboro country,” he said.

A dump truck trailing a cloud of dust came up the road. A man got out, Ernie’s dogs barking at his heels.

“This is my helper, Ben. Help us feed the horses. We’ll be back for supper.”

We squeezed four abreast into the dump truck and drove to a silo at the end of a track. Ben backed the truck under the spout of an auger. Ernie pulled the starter cord, but the auger’s engine didn’t start. He and I took turns pulling the cord while Ben experimented with the engine. I had a look and found that the spark plug was so loose it had almost fallen out. Ernie explained that he was good with horses but bad with engines. After he tightened it, the auger started with a sooty roar, and it

soon filled the dump truck with a ton of grain.

We drove to a steel gate. Ben opened the gate as hundreds of horses walked and trotted on the other side. Ernie backed the truck up to a steel-and-wood feed box built under a wind-powered well. Ernie pulled a lever, the truck's box tilted higher, and the grain filled the feedbox.

"They won't come near the grain until we leave," said Ernie.

Pearl walked to the horses, but none would approach her. Without signing, I asked Ernie about the economics of his business, something it turned out that Pearl had never done, despite her interest in having her own business. I asked him where his horses came from, how much they cost, where they went, and why they seemed to be feral.

"Horses are my life, I love them more than anything. But I buy them from Manitoba PMU farms and I sell them to Alberta slaughterhouses. PMU stands for Pregnant Mare Urine. The farms breed mares and collect urine while they're pregnant. The piss is made into hormone pills; that's where the brand name Premarin comes from. I buy the foals, retired mares, and stallions. I fatten them up, and then they go for horsemeat. Europeans like horsemeat, but I've never tasted it. I could never bring myself to tell Pearl the truth."

We drove back to Ernie's home, the truck heater blasting mercifully on our legs. Pearl was glad to have an interpreter with her, and she was proud to have a hearing husband. We ate Kraft Dinner and listened to Ernie's cowboy tales. Then, we climbed into bunk beds in Ernie's spare room for the night. I could see no reason to unmask Ernie's deception, and I kept his secret, too.

For me, the highlight of our trip was our visit to the Alberta School for the Deaf. We walked inside, dressed in leather from neck to toe, carrying helmets, goggles, and gloves and looking like World War I flying aces.

A woman approached. "May I help you?" she signed and said, rather firmly. Then she did a double-take, and her jaw dropped. "My God!—it's *Pearl!*" she signed and shouted. "I didn't think I'd *ever* see her again."

The women hugged and laughed. "Meet Joan, the only teacher I ever liked. She didn't have a negative attitude like the other teachers."

"Can we look around the school?"

1986: Newlyweds

“I’m sorry, but it isn’t allowed. It’s a rule here,” Joan signed and said.

“But we rode from *Vancouver*. I know my way. Let me show Derrick the school. No problem, I promise.”

“Well, then, I’ll escort you. The first term doesn’t start until next week, so you’re lucky. You can leave your jackets in the office.”

We walked down a corridor and peered in an open door. The room was empty but for a woman and boy. The woman wore a microphone-headset and was talking and signing. The boy listened to her through headphones with large padded cups. Then a bell rang and a red light mounted over the door spun. The teacher and student left the classroom together, smiling and signing.

“That light looks like it came from a police car,” I signed.

“It did come from a police car,” Joan signed and said. “Usually there are ten or 15 students in there, but this is the last day of summer school.”

“I had to sit in a group wearing headphones while the teacher talked without signing. I couldn’t understand, so I didn’t learn anything except from the blackboard and books.” Joan interpreted effortlessly.

“Signing wasn’t allowed in the classroom. If parents chose to sign at home, that was their choice, but we told them that they were hindering their children’s language development and strongly discouraged them from doing so.”

“I had to wait until the teacher wrote on the blackboard before I could learn. It was like reading a book word ... by ... word. It made me fall asleep! I’m not very good at lipreading. Does that mean I’m not allowed to learn? Many students had the same problem. Teachers hit students who signed, but we dared to sign behind the teachers’ backs to avoid going crazy in class.”

“Now we communicate every way we can. In 1964, the Babbidge Report by the US Congress on deaf education concluded that oral education was a failure—but then it took *ten years* before the USA passed a mainstreaming act, and Canada followed. Pearl just missed it.”

“Does the new system work better?”

“There are pros and cons. It’s hard to promote reading and writing in a signing environment. In childhood, the hassle of English is reduced, but although it’s easier to learn *other* subjects than before, it’s harder to

1986: Newlyweds

learn *English*. Few graduates reach grade nine reading* because English is their second language. Their first language, ASL, is useless outside, so the tradeoff for using it in the classroom is further isolation of deafies and limitation of their opportunities when they leave. Limited reading spells immaturity, whether you are deaf, blind, hearing, or sighted.”

Pearl led us into a dormitory. “Look at those beds in a row. We had to fold the sheets like in the army, without one wrinkle. We were punished if we didn’t make our beds perfectly every day.” We went into a white-tiled bathroom lined with washbasins at child height. “See this row of hooks? Our facecloths had to be hung by their corners in diamonds. The towels went on those racks and had to be in squares.”

Pearl suddenly laughed so hard she couldn’t sign for a moment, and then pointed at the bathroom door. “We had a lot of fun. One time we were furious at the supervisor, so we soaped the floor. Then we all started shouting and banging on things. She came running through that door, slipped, and fell flat, sliding along the floor.”

“She was lucky she didn’t break her hip on that hard floor!”

“I remember. You were the leader,” said Joan.

“We were punished, but I got the most punishment. She put chairs next to each other and lay a stick across them. We had to put our hands on our heads and balance on our shins on the stick. It hurt! We got bruises on our legs. Sometimes, we would be spanked in front of the other students. Sometimes, we had to kneel on salt.”

“That’s awful! Why didn’t you report all this to your parents?” I said.

“Because we had been bad but we wanted our parents to think we had been good. The school never punished us near the end of the term, so we never came home with bruises. When I graduated, I had spent most of my life inside this building. Punishment made me tough. When

* Grade 9 seemed to be an improvement over Pearl’s cohort, 15 years previously: of the 98% of deaf applicants who were accepted by St. Paul TVI, only 3% could read English at a grade nine level; most entrants read English at a grade four level. Only 8% had basic proficiency in mathematics. Source: St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute, *Improved Vocational, Technical, and Academic Opportunities for Deaf Persons* (August 1974)

1986: Newlyweds

someone asked if I was oral or deaf, I would answer, 'I'm a rebel.'"

"Pearl *was* a rebel. Unfortunately for her, she arrived just a few years after we opened, and she left just a few years before we disallowed corporal punishment and we allowed sign language."

"A rebel example—my friend and I were looking at dresses in a store. The woman saw our signs and told us to leave because she thought we had no money. So we went out and threw a rock through the window and waited for the police. The policeman did nothing. That was our revenge to her. Some students were mean to me, too. Now when they see me, they say, 'Remember me at school?' I laugh at them and say, 'I forgot your name.' That lets them know that they are not important to me."

I had an idea. "Can Pearl see her files?"

"Yes! I want to see what they said about me 20 years ago."

"You have the right to see your files, but they are school property."

We waited in Joan's office while she went to the storeroom.

"Adults have to punish disobedient children, and not only deafies. I got punished, too. My mother told me that when I was in grade three the teacher taped my mouth 'for answering too many questions and not giving other kids a chance.' I was strapped for opening my soft drink which sprayed because someone had shaken it, strapped for saying 'I dislike school' when we had to make a sentence with the prefix 'dis-' and strapped for skipping school to avoid getting strapped again."

Joan returned and put a manila folder as thick as a telephone book on the table. She untied the string, and we watched over Pearl's shoulders while she and flipped through 13 years of her history.

I didn't pick up and read her documents, only skimmed them from a respectful distance as Pearl flipped through the folder. Her report cards were normal, but I didn't see any achievement awards. She was intelligent, according to an aptitude test. There must have been an incident of some kind, because a memo between a psychologist and the school mentioned counseling. I didn't see any reports of specific incidents and punishments, such as the one that Pearl and Joan had just remembered. I didn't see anything in her file that might alarm parents or implicate the school.

Pearl closed the file with a sigh. "I know all this."

“I’m glad you visited. I may not have a job soon. We had ten kids in each grade at one time, but we are down to half of that now. Nowadays parents view institutional schools as a last resort and mainstream their children if they’ve got any hearing at all.”

“Mainstream with interpreters?” I asked, thinking of Nathan.

“Yes. Residential deaf schools cost four times as much as living at home while mainstreaming in public schools, even including the cost of interpreters. And after the mainstreamed deafies are out of public school, they’re less likely to end up on welfare than if they’d been educated here. They get to live with their families. They get a real-world education in the hearing environment, and they learn to compete in the real world. The deafies are interacting with hearing kids, and the hearing kids are interacting with deafie kids, too. That gives the hearingies and the deafies respect for each other, and it gives the deafies self-respect. It’s difficult to help children mature inside an institution.”

Pearl’s Mensa test result was in the mailbox. Mensa didn’t report her IQ score except to say that it was below their cutoff of 132. I told Pearl that hers must be 131. Her embarrassment about her result reminded me of the time Eugénie and I had sat the Law School Admission Test together, and my percentile ranking was more than double hers. It was a bell that could never be un-rung; Eugénie never looked at me the same way again; I worried if Pearl might find herself in the same psychological situation.

Alan and Rose bought a mare named Yarby and boarded her with us. Now that we had two well-trained horses, Pearl taught me how to saddle a horse and ride it, at first in our fields and then on the trails near the lake. I rode Mouse while Pearl, her ponytail bouncing, rode Yarby. We paused on the trail from time to time to pick the salmonberries that were abundant in places higher than deer and hikers could reach. I kept a framed photo of Pearl riding Yarby on my desk for years.

As the days grew grayer, Pearl and I prepared for winter. We seeded the pastures with rye using the Cyclone spreader so that fodder would grow in the spring. We wheelbarrowed rows of firewood into the basement lest snow, injury, or illness prevent it when the wood was most needed. I installed floodlights on our new barn power poles, ending the

need for flashlights at chore time but also ending the magic of the night.

Pearl dropped our mail onto the table, all of it opened. She held up a brochure for *Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Education*, the government course required before applying for a hunting license.

“What is this?”

“I was thinking of getting a hunting license so we can own venison. I would have to buy a bow, but I could shoot a deer by the barn. It was Ralph’s idea.” I picked up another letter. “The Elks are inviting me to join. But we are too busy now, and it’s mostly old people.”

“I don’t want to join. Many times Mother invited me to the Royal Purple, the woman’s part of the Elks. I refused because the Elks are against signing. They say they support the deaf, but they only support the Hearing Resource Centre, and HRS only supports oral deafies.”

I should have seized the chance to get to know her mother directly, but I was short-sighted. I couldn’t see how bad things were going to get.

Clifford urged me to pay Frank our holdback, now with Frank’s legal fees added to it. Pearl and I capitulated and paid Frank the contract balance of \$10,000 plus \$3,000 for both lawyers. We had lost a year and a half, and we still had more repairs to make to his work.

I bypassed the plumbing Frank had put in the attic with new pipes in the basement so the water wouldn’t freeze in winter again. We patched Frank’s dozens of drywall faults by cutting, fitting, screwing, supporting, plastering, sanding, and repainting pieces of drywall into the holes.

I hired Eddie to improve the upper field drainage using his backhoe. While we were enjoying a friendly chat, he said, “I’m the guy who put your septic tank on a rock.”

“You should be ashamed of yourself! We had to dig it up, patch it, dig a new hole, and fill in the old one. Why didn’t you refuse to do it?”

“I *told* Frank to blast the rock so the tank could be bedded properly, but he said to put it on the rock and cover it. So I that’s what I did.”

“Why didn’t you tell me when you were here setting my fence posts?”

“Because I heard you were in a lawsuit, and I wanted to stay out of it.”

I resumed MBA classes, sleeping on my sister’s apartment floor twice a week. The long joint baths that Pearl and I took became separate quick

showers as my classes, her post office shift work, and our renewed home construction projects gently brushed our romance aside.

Oct:

You Tried to Kill Me!

Alan knocked on the door. “I’d like to butcher a lamb, but Rose won’t let me screw a meat hook into our kitchen ceiling. May I do it in your barn? I want to do this once, for the experience.”

“You may, but our house is cleaner than our barn. There’s already a hook in the rafters on the unfinished side. I can help you.”

The next morning, Alan carried a lamb from the barn and set it down in front of the house. While Pearl fed the gentle creature a handful of grain and petted it. Alan tied a rope around its hind leg. The moment the lamb finished eating, it yanked its foot out of the rope and walked into the forest. For an hour, the three of us encircled and lost the lamb again and again. The lamb seemed more interested in foraging than escaping, but it would always walk away at the last moment. Trying to corral it was fun but futile. Finally, Alan asked me to shoot it. I brought my .22, aimed, and fired. The lamb fell over like a stuffed doll as the *crack!* echoed from the hills.

It looked up at us without moving. Alan picked it up.

“You got it in the neck, so it’s quadriplegic. Now we can kill and bleed it properly.”

Pearl disappeared while Alan and I killed and slaughtered the lamb.

After weeks of repairs, the walls and ceiling were ready for repainting. I bought five recessed light fixtures for the kitchen. We needed to install them before we painted the ceiling.

“It’s a two-man job, so you need to help. You go in the attic and pull the wire to each hole. I’ll stand here and wave a light through each hole so you can find it. You push the wire to me. I’ll pull it down and push another wire up. You pull that wire to the next hole, and push it down. Then I give you another wire, and so on to the last hole.”

“*You* should work in the attic because you know where the wires go.”

“But the space in the attic over the kitchen is low. I will wreck the

1986: Newlyweds

ceiling if I slip. This wiring should have been done before the ceiling was installed. If you need to communicate, then sign through a hole. It is too far from the kitchen to the attic hatch in the bedroom to go back.”

Pearl put on her overalls, coat, and gardening kneepads, and climbed the ladder in the bedroom into the attic hatch. I passed the utility lamp to her and guided its long yellow cord into the hatch as she disappeared with it.

Five minutes later, Pearl lowered her hand through the first hole.

“Turn off the electricity.”

That wasn’t part of the plan, but it was difficult to reply through the hole, so I shut off the kitchen circuit. The kitchen was plunged into darkness. I looked up into the lamp-hole and saw her face illuminated by the utility lamp. I passed the next wire up, but Pearl didn’t take it.

After 15 minutes, she climbed out of the attic hatch, livid.

“You tried to kill me with electricity! I pushed the end of the wire against a metal box, and I saw *sparks!*”

“The power was on inside the first wire because it is connected to the kitchen, and I wanted to have light while we worked. Now the kitchen is dark because you asked me to turn off the power. You were safe. The insulation protects you, like an extension cord.”

“No, I tested you! What if I touched the electricity wires inside?”

“Nothing will happen. You were on dry wood. You were safe.”

I tried to hug her, but she pulled back. I climbed into the attic, and we continued, with our locations reversed. I worked in the attic, often banging my head on the rafters. After several hours, we completed the installation of the wiring for the kitchen lights.

Once again, Pearl was as calm as if she had not just made an outburst. And, once again, I assumed that was the end of it.

Father helped me slaughter the pigs. I had made an electric heater for the cast-iron bathtub outside the barn, and by the time Father arrived the water in the tub was steaming.

“It’s been 50 years since I slaughtered anything bigger than a fish. Where is Pearl?”

“She’s painting. Slaughtering pigs is too much work for her and me.

Two pigs were nearly too much for Rokus and me, and we had two wives and a backhoe to help.”

I removed the heater from the bathtub, poured in a cup of lye, and turned off the electric fence. I backed a squealing pig into the corner of the sty and gripped a flailing hind trotter while Father struggled to tie a rope around it. I led the rope under the electric fence, then Father and I stood in the barn and hauled at the rope as in a tug-of-war. We heaved and strained, but the pig stood defiant in the sweet fall air. One pig was far stronger than two men.

We heard laughter. Pearl looked down from the hill. “The pig won!”
“Please bring the truck.”

Pearl drove the truck into the field and parked it by the sty. I tied the rope to the bumper. I drove the truck slowly with the howling pig in tow by one hind leg, its other trotters gouging three trenches in the soil. The truck dragged the beast near the barn door, and, when it was in the right spot, Father pushed it into the barn and bolted the door. I turned the electric fence back on, and Pearl went back to her house-painting.

Using the hayloft block-and-tackle, Father and I hung the pig upside down in the doorway. It grunted as it swayed. Following the instructions in Morton’s *Meat Curing Made Easy*, I slipped the knife under its breastbone and swiveled it downward to sever its main artery. The stuck pig passed out instantly. Its beating heart pumped out its blood in a torrent, turning the mud outside the barn purple. When its convulsions ceased, we swung it over the tub and lowered it into the water. We scalded it until the hair came loose, and then hoisted it onto planks set across sawhorses. We removed the hair with two bell scrapers.

“Where on earth did you buy these special scrapers?”

“Pacific Butcher Supply. I bought the scrapers, lye, gloves, skinning knife, butcher’s knife, meat saw, bone-dust scraper, sugar cure, curing trays, freezer paper, and the handbook, all tax-deductible, of course.”

We rinsed the carcass, put hooks behind the Achilles tendons, and hoisted it in the doorway over the wheelbarrow. We decapitated it, eviscerated it, rinsed the organs in the barn sink, and sawed it in half. We walked to the house, each carrying a side of pork on our shoulder and a pail of organ meat, and hung the sides in the unfinished side of the

1986: Newlyweds

basement to cool. Pearl washed and wrapped the organs while Father and I ate the salad and pasta that she had prepared.

I looked in *Small-Scale Pig Raising* for a better way to move a pig—backward! I put a bucket over the other pig’s head and pushed it while Father pulled it by its tail into the barn. We slaughtered the second pig. It was physically demanding work, and each pig took hours; we had more father-and-son bonding on Bowen Island than ever before.

The next morning, Pearl and I began to butcher the sides by following the instructions in the Morton handbook. I sawed and trimmed; Pearl wrapped, weighed, labeled, and kept records; and we carried armfuls of wrapped brown packages downstairs to the freezer. We put the bacon into plastic trays for curing and put the remainders in pails to grind into sausages. With our hands so busy, we couldn’t sign, so I listened to *A Prairie Home Companion* on the radio.

After 12 hours of butchering, I signed. “My arms are falling off.”

“We made 100 kilos of pork—more than 500 servings!”

Every evening for a week, we made bacon and sausages. We rubbed curing salt into the bellies and slabs of back bacon and stacked the trays in the refrigerator to age. We ground the remainders with goat meat, garlic, pepper, salt, and spices. Pearl fed handfuls of meat into the electric grinder while I twisted the casings off the spout, sausage after sausage, kilo after kilo, tray after tray. We saved ground pork for goat cheese pasta. But that weekend, even though we were exhausted, we knew it was worthwhile when we ate leek-and-potato soup, pork tenderloin stuffed with chèvre, and the last of our home-grown vegetables.

“Everything was made here: pork, milk, cheese, vegetables, pickles, and even the well water. And we are warm because of our firewood.”

“My hands ache,” signed Pearl, “but it is hard for me to explain how wonderful I feel. Frank is gone, and all the pieces of a good life are coming together.”

Dec:**First Anniversary**

I cut a Christmas tree for our second Christmas on Bowen Island. Pearl gathered holly and made a wreath for the door. Our home looked cozy.

At the company Christmas party, my boss's boss, a polyglot Dutch aristocrat married to royalty, met Pearl and liked her immediately. He was so taken by her that he made an exception to the party couples-can't-sit-together rule and asked Pearl to sit next to him, with me on the other side of her to be their interpreter.

Sometimes they wrote notes so I could eat. At the end of the evening, he wanted to keep the notepad as a souvenir, but Pearl yanked it from his hands—she never wanted strangers to keep her conversation transcripts. He was startled that such a vivacious guest, whose company he had enjoyed all evening, could suddenly behave so rudely. I'll never forget his sarcastic remark: "What a *charming* guest." It was fortunate that my boss's boss came to know Pearl, because he, like my boss, would later do all he could do to help me through the turmoil that lay ahead.

"Look at this advertisement in the *Undercurrent*," signed Pearl. "A new king-size bed for 25 percent off. We can keep our old bed for visitors."

"It's a 'futon,' a kind of mattress, not a bed. We would need a box to lift it off the floor."

"Then we could store the stuff in the living room inside that box."

"Good idea." I called the advertiser, and we drove to a new house at the end of a lane behind a paddock. Two sheep stood in the paddock.

A woman about our age greeted us. "I'm Arlette. I'm pleased to meet you. I've seen you two on the ferry."

A beige cylinder the size of a sewer pipe lay on her living room floor. We unrolled it on the floor. It was pure cotton and very heavy.

"Why are you selling it while it is new?" signed Pearl.

"It won't fit in our bedroom, and the store doesn't accept returns."

"Why didn't you measure your room first?" I signed and said.

"Offer her half price," signed Pearl.

"Half price," I signed and said.

"Half price!" Arlette spat out the words. "Then we will pay the same

1986: Newlyweds

price as you, but you have the futon.”

“You paid \$300, and you can’t use the futon or your living room. For \$150, we will give you back your living room.”

Arlette seemed to think I was taking advantage of her, and she would not budge from her price. I told her to call us if she changed her mind.

Pearl and I agreed that a futon on a box was a good solution for both sleeping and storage and that a new one for \$300, with a guarantee, was better than \$225 for Arlette’s. I built a king-size wooden box, moved the cartons in the living room into it, and bought a futon from the store where Arlette had bought hers. The following morning, we found ourselves out of reach of each other because the bed was so large!

December 24 and 25 were Christmas, Pearl’s birthday, and our anniversary. For our anniversary, I added two diamonds to her wedding ring, even though it was money that would have been better spent on the house. Her ring was the most valuable item we owned, and Pearl was very proud of it; none of her friends had anything like it. For her Christmas present, I built a television into the dashboard of the truck, something unheard of in those days. I loved Pearl deeply.

The telephone rang just after Christmas. “Derrick, this is Donna at the Bowen Building Centre. Pearl won our Christmas raffle—a clock radio! I’m calling to ask if we should put her ticket back in the bin and draw the next one.” She giggled crassly.

“Pearl wants her prize. We’ll be right over.” We drove to the store, and Donna handed Pearl her clock radio, a Panasonic.

“I enter every contest I can. Deaf people have hearing friends, so we need radios. Should blind people have no TVs?”

While we were talking to Donna, a Toyota pickup parked next to our Nissan, and Arlette came in.

“You can have our futon for half price,” Arlette said, without smiling, as if we were ripping her off. “No one else was interested.”

“It’s too late. We just bought a new one,” I signed and said.

Arlette glared at me as if I had disrespected her. “Why didn’t you call me first?”

I tried to be friendly, but Arlette had taken a dislike to me, and she

would disrespect me later on.

Julian invited us to his New Year's Eve party and then to stay overnight. I had only seen him twice after I met Pearl because we lived on opposite ends of the city, and he had only seen her once. On New Year's Eve, after evening chores, we left Bowen with Whisky.

"I'm glad you could come, Pearl. And thanks for bringing your interpreter," Julian said with a wink.

"I'll interpret, but not all night. I brought a notepad because Pearl never brings one. Being the only deafie at a hearing party or the only hearie at a deafie party is a problem we haven't solved."

Pearl was treated like a guest of honor. Everyone enjoyed Pearl's stories, and she signed them as quickly as I could interpret them.

"How do you manage at a drive-in with intercoms, like McDonald's?" said a woman seated on the floor with her legs wrapped around Kostas, a classmate who wore an expensive watch outside his sleeve.

"I drive past the intercom to the checkout window to give my order to a human—we know our rights. I know a man who wanted to work in a bakery, but he was refused because he was deaf. So he asked his friends to come to the bakery at night with a truck. They removed all the equipment from the bakery. Some did the work while the others looked out. Only wires were left, hanging from the walls. When the baker came to work, I am sure he learned his lesson."

Pearl laughed at the memory, but we were shocked. For a moment, I was embarrassed to be with her.

"His lesson was to avoid deaf people," said Kostas. "We loved college pranks, but without any harm. Derrick, tell the wine bottle story."

"When our friends got married, I built a radio transmitter into a wine bottle. We wrapped it with a full bottle of wine and gave the package to them as they left the reception. We followed them in radio-equipped cars. For a while, we could hear everything they said, but their sports car was too fast; they raced through the mountains, and so we lost contact. We heard later that when they got to their honeymoon cabin, the groom unwrapped the package while the bride was in the bath. He knew what

1986: Newlyweds

it was and shouted, 'Holy shit!' When his bride saw the bottle of wires, she put her clothes back on! He took it outside, smashed the bottle, and pulled the wires apart. Then they spent two hours looking out the window while drinking from the other bottle, wondering if we were out there in the dark. On their wedding night!"

"You didn't tell me that story."

"You saw that transmitter; after I got it back, I rebuilt it into the wireless motorcycle alarm we used in Mexico and Guatemala."

"Their marriage didn't last," said Kostas. "None of our student marriages lasted, and then the divorces split our friendships when people took sides. Derrick and Eugénie were the last to split. His cleverness helped our study group score at the top in the toughest math course in the electrical engineering program."

Pearl looked unnerved. "Did you cheat?"

"Of course not," I signed and said. "I had often gone to see the professor for extra help. While he was helping me, I fished for what types of questions were likely to be, or not to be, on the exam. The equations were so complex that one question could take an hour to solve; therefore, there couldn't be more than three questions on the exam. I shared my information with our study group, and we worked through the likely questions over and over. We all got first-class marks!"

"Why did he tell you the questions?"

"He didn't tell me the questions. I analyzed everything he said, and I guessed the questions. The following year, the mathematics department changed the system so that no professor would know all the questions."

In the wee hours of 1 January 1987, after the rest of the guests had gone, Pearl, Julian, his wife, Whisky, and I walked upstairs to go to bed. We looked down from the mezzanine at the notes scattered all over the floor.

"You had a lot of conversations," I signed and said, with a smile.

"Yes, but every time you got tired of interpreting, I stopped being in your group. In the future, I will bring a deafie with me to talk to."

1987: Metamorphosis

Jan:

Pearl Calls Chicago

We had plenty of hay for the winter, so we advertised for more business:

Horse Boarding: Trout Lake, 2 km from Snug Cove.
Stable and paddock with freeze-proof automatic water.
We feed Buckerfield's pellets and alfalfa mix hay. \$150.

Blaze soon arrived, Gus's family's second horse. Mouse, Senator, and Yarby knew their stalls so, within a day, all four horses entered the barn in single file at feeding time, each going to his own stall as if he could read the name-sign over his manger. We remained full until Wendy came for Senator; but a few months later, Dream replaced Senator, so we were full again. Trout Lake Farm was making good money.

We continued to finish the house out of our cash flow. We installed a Beam central vacuum cleaning system to make the house more livable. It wasn't yet carpeted, but now it was easy to vacuum the dust.

Snow covered Bowen Island in white. With snow on the ground, we had to walk up and down the hill with backpacks and flashlights twice a day, but the pipes no longer froze in the house or the barn. There was plenty of seasoned firewood in the basement to keep us warm. The floodlights on the trail to the barn made the chores easier, but they obliterated the stars so on clear nights so we often left them turned off. We felt like we were living in a fairy tale.

On 6 February, I left for a one-week business trip, my second since we had been together. Like my previous trip, Pearl drove me to the airport so I could claim the bank's generous mileage allowance, and she promised to pick me up when I returned. I arrived at the Chicago Hilton at midnight. As soon as I fell asleep, the telephone woke me up.

"This is the Vancouver Message Relay Centre. Pearl King is calling for Derrick King."

"Go ahead."

1987: Metamorphosis

“Why didn’t you call to tell me you arrived in Chicago?”

“I told you that I will not call you from the hotel telephone. It is very expensive. I said I would call you from the office tomorrow. It is three in the morning here, and you woke me up. I have to work tomorrow.”

“You didn’t tell me your room number. The receptionist had to ask.”

“I told you my flights and my hotel name. Room numbers are assigned after you arrive. You know that. You stayed in hotels before.”

“I will find out.” Pearl hung up on me.

I waited for Pearl at the airport when I returned. In the days before cellphones, appointments had to be kept on time. I waited an hour, but she didn’t arrive. There was nothing to do but take a taxi to Horseshoe Bay, walk onto the ferry, and walk two kilometers uphill to the house wearing a suit and Oxford shoes, carrying my briefcase and suitcase. My feet were wet, I was chilled to the bone, and my arms were aching.

I was furious, but the moment I saw the woman on the sofa who was watching TV, munching potato chips, and ignoring me, I calmed down. I saw a different Pearl now, and I knew better than to get angry with her.

“I waited at the airport for an hour. Then I walked here from the ferry. Why didn’t you come in the truck?”

Pearl pointed at the TV and gave me a supercilious look. “I ordered cable TV while you were away. Now it’s your turn to do the chores.”

She slept on the couch for the second time, as if she were punishing me for flying away to have an affair, not to do the work that paid most of our bills. She dreamed of motherhood, but she was making it impossible.

Pearl pointed to an advertisement in the *Undercurrent*. “A businessman announces he will build a pub on Bowen Island. He is offering a prize for the best name. I will enter the name Bowen Island Pub.”

“That’s is too obvious. I think he is looking for a special name.”

“What’s wrong with Bowen Island Pub? What would you name it?”

“I don’t know, but Bowen Island Pub sounds too ordinary.”

Pearl didn’t enter the contest. A few weeks later, the name of the pub was announced: Bowen Island Pub! No one had entered the name, so the pub saved itself the expense of a prize.

Pearl was furious. “You didn’t want me to win!”

1987: Metamorphosis

“I wanted you to win—that’s why I wanted you to enter a special name. I didn’t say you couldn’t enter that name if you really wanted to.”

“You want me to lose! You hold me under your thumb!”

Mar:

I Want a Baby

I groped under the truck seat for something to read while waiting in the ferry lineup, and I found a copy of *Cosmopolitan*. The quiz *Rate Your Husband’s Sexual IQ* had been filled out. I was stunned to see that Pearl had ticked the boxes for “*I suspect he has had homosexual relations*” and “*I know he masturbates.*” I put the magazine back and thought about what I had seen. Sex with Pearl had been affectionate but little more, partly because it was usually in positions where we could see each other’s faces but mainly because she had low libido. I couldn’t see how our dull sex life could lead her to think I was having sex with men. Worse, seeing her first husband in a gay bar was the only justification Pearl had given me for leaving him; if she now thought I was gay, which I obviously wasn’t, then maybe he wasn’t gay, either. If he was straight, then Pearl had summarily divorced on mere suspicion, and she might do so again.

Each spring day the sun climbed higher. Mothergoat had three kids: two bucks and, at last, a doe. Pearl and I put the doe in her own pen, named her Scapegoat, and bottle-fed her so she became as affectionate as a dog. We loved Scapegoat as much as Whisky. We disbudded the kids and elastrated the bucks together quickly and efficiently, as a team. I believe our life on Bowen Island was the best life that either of us had ever had.

“Sometimes I become so frustrated with hearies that I want to cry,” signed Pearl. “My elbow hurt, so I saw the doctor. The doctor sent me to the specialist, but I went to the wrong office. I wrote a note to the receptionist to call the doctor to get the right directions. She read my note and handed me the telephone!” Pearl slapped her forehead in frustration. “I went next door, and that receptionist called for me.” The specialist’s report said Pearl had repetitive stress injury and needed to change her work or have surgery to relocate her elbow nerve. “I want

1987: Metamorphosis

that surgery. If my elbow gets worse, I won't be able to sign. I will get sick leave. Then I want to stop the Pill and have a baby. I want a child at the table to talk to you and sign to me. And then I want to quit."

Pearl had been revealing frequently that she didn't trust anyone, including me, but until she trusted me it would be wrong to have a child. I loved her and could continue to share a childless house with her even if she didn't trust me, but I didn't want to have a single mother raising my child. Babies aren't marriage glue—devotion is. You can trust your mate without being devoted but you can't be devoted if you don't trust your mate. Pearl was becoming unstable. By law, I couldn't give a woman a baby without granting her an alimony call option: monthly payments enforced by garnishee, driver's license suspension, and even jail. Pearl could have our baby, walk out with the baby on mere suspicion, sue me for alimony, and semi-retire like Elizabeth.

"We need time. If you quit now, we won't be able to finish the house. Do you want a baby to crawl in the dust on the plywood?"

"My parents were 20 when I was born. I'm 33! A woman can't wait like a man. Think of ideas! We can rent the basement and the other side of the house for storage, or borrow money to finish them and rent them for living. A baby will not come for nine months. Then I will sell jade."

"No one rents damp storage, and we already have two mortgages. My mother was 34 when she had her first child and 42 when she had her last child. We need two salaries for one year to finish this half of the house."

"Don't tell me that Frank Schutt has stopped me from having a baby. He can go to hell! Jodi is pregnant. What is your goal now?"

"To enjoy our life and finish the house, then have a family. Let's do this: you have the operation and take recovery time off work. You work for a year while I finish my MBA. With my MBA, I get a better job. We have a baby, and you quit. Can you get lighter work after the operation?"

"No. All deafies at the post office sort mail. I have decided to stop the Pill. What do you say about that?"

Disagreeing was not an option because I would have no way of knowing whether Pearl continued to take the Pill. It dawned on me that neither of us now trusted each other; so much had changed so quickly.

"OK," I signed.

1987: Metamorphosis

Pearl was elated. “This is my only chance to have a child. I know it. You’re God in your universe. I will tell you more philosophy later. My period came—maybe that’s why I was emotional.” She kissed me.

In my view, our construction delay had been due to a disastrous decision that I had made, but Pearl’s childlessness as she approached middle age was the result of many decisions that she had made for more than ten years. But, at this point, what options did we have?

1. Have a baby. Let the housing, financial, and relationship chips fall where they may, as Pearl demanded. This selfish risk-taking wouldn’t have been fair to anyone, especially to our child. I couldn’t do it.

2. Divorce. Sell our half-finished house into a depressed market, losing our equity after paying the commission and mortgages. We would have no house, no money, no spouse, and no children. I wouldn’t do it.

3. Delay having a family until our housing, financial, and relationship situations were in reasonable order. Pearl wouldn’t do it.

In my view, the third option was the only sensible one to choose, so, although I would continue to love Pearl, I would try to delay making her pregnant until our situation improved. Our sex life would have to suffer—Pearl’s questionnaire response *I know he masturbates* was prophetic—but sex wasn’t something Pearl would miss. I hoped she would return to normal when she saw our house and bank accounts improving. I was naïve to think that her trust and devotion would ever return, especially while I was living a lie, but postponing pregnancy unless and until Pearl stabilized would prove to be one of the best decisions I ever made, for her, for me, and for our unborn child.

Pearl stopped taking the Pill and had the elbow operation, an outpatient procedure. She was granted two months leave while she wore a splint and had physiotherapy. While she recovered, I did all the chores while she munched junk-food on the sofa, chewed her fingernails to the quick, and watched police, game, and action shows on TV. None of her pastimes did anything to advance her English or her knowledge; none pursued her goals for happiness which she had written in her executive agenda before we met and which had so impressed me.

Yet, despite our tension, I was still so devoted to Pearl and so proud

1987: Metamorphosis

to be her husband that when my UBC Engineering class held its decennial reunion in the spring of 1987, I refused to attend it because wives were excluded (our class of 1977 was the last all-male cohort.)

May:

Fuck You, Pig

As climbed into the truck on my way to the Fraser Valley Livestock Auction to buy piglets for the year's pork, Pearl signed, "Buy a duck for the garden."

I returned with three piglets and a dozen ducklings. I put the piglets in the sty and made a cat-proof heated cage for the ducklings.

Pearl was livid. "I wanted a duck in the garden, not ducklings in a box!"

"You can't buy one duck. Ducklings cost almost nothing. In two months, you can pick one adult, and we'll eat the others."

"You never pay attention to me!"

Pearl ignored me for the rest of the day and slept on her edge of the bed that night. Her volatility did nothing to kindle the flames of passion, but this was fine with me now: I didn't mind her cold shoulder on any night because it was another night when she wouldn't become pregnant. She couldn't get pregnant on MBA nights twice a week, when I slept on my sister's floor, or during her periods. And because she never initiated sex, it was easy to avoid making love on her fertile days.

After we made love, Pearl would sign, "Swim, swim!" to her belly, but I was playing Vatican Roulette. Sadly for both of us, covert *coitus interruptus* was my frustrating friend.

My MBA class was interrupted by a knock on the door. A woman walked into the classroom. "Urgent message for Mr. King!" My classmates stared at me as I followed her into the corridor. "Your wife's had an accident. She's in Lion's Gate Hospital. She broke her foot."

I drove to the hospital in North Vancouver. When I arrived in the emergency room, Pearl was sitting in a chair in whitewashed overalls with her left foot in a gumboot and her right foot bare on a stool.

"What happened? How do you feel?"

1987: Metamorphosis

“I feel ... mellow. I had a painkiller shot,” she signed. “I kicked a piglet. I was trying to pour the food into the trough, but the piglets kept pushing and shoving. I kicked one on the head, and I broke my toe.”

Pearl was now so quick to explode that she kicked animals, but I couldn't help but laugh. I was in a pinstriped suit, white shirt, and tie, while she looked like a Beverly Hillbilly. Other patients stared at us.

“She kicked a pig,” I said, as if only the kicking was unusual.

Pearl told me she had used the emergency autodialer, and it had worked; the ambulance, police, and fire department had all arrived in a few minutes only to find Pearl hopping around the house on one foot.

Crows soon discovered the pig trough and ate the feed which the piglets did not immediately consume, so we made a scarecrow. When we came home from work, we found crows perched on our scarecrow.

“Can you shoot the crows?” signed Pearl.

“There are so many. I will ask Laurent for permission.”

Laurent was parked at his usual spot at Snug Cove just past the crest of the hill, where his presence calmed traffic. I explained our crow problem to him.

“Shoot one. I hate the filthy scavengers. No one's going to report just one shot. You'll only need one shot because the best scarecrow is a dead crow. Would you eat at a restaurant with a corpse at the table?”

I brought my rifle to the barn at evening chore time. A score of crows roosted in the trees and on the scarecrow, waiting for their banquet. I fed the horses, goats, and ducks first, and the piglets last. The piglets ate for a few minutes, then rooted around the sty. I leaned against the barn with the .22, ready to fire, but the crows waited for me to leave. I walked inside the barn and stood inside the open door, but still the crows did not move. I climbed to the hayloft, found a knothole facing the sty, and peered through it. A few minutes later, the crows flew down to the trough. I aimed through the hole and fired. All but one crow took flight. The casualty staggered onto the electric fence and lay twitching with each electric pulse, like Galvani's frog. The piglets sniffed the animated corpse and backed away. We had no more problems with crows.

We weaned Scapegoat. I slaughtered her siblings, and we did the

1987: Metamorphosis

butchering together. I sold most of the goat meat to the South Asians who worked in my office. The ducks grew quickly, and their constant quacking added a new voice to the chorus in the barn.

Twice a day, Scapegoat waited anxiously for Pearl or me to arrive in the barn with food and to stroke her under the chin. She bellowed and ran to us whenever she saw us, as tame as a dog. We made a collar for her, so she looked like a pet, and took her for walks to the lake. Children loved Scapegoat, and we loved this affectionate addition to our life.

Jul:

Unhappy Campers

“It’s the middle of summer,” signed Pearl. “We need a holiday, something different. We could buy a camper. It can pay for itself, and we can also use it to sleep downtown, our own mobile hotel.”

We bought a cheap, old, mildewed, wood-frame camper with neither a shower nor a toilet from the *Buy and Sell Press*. We trucked it home, set it on blocks, and cleaned it up. A few days later, when Pearl arrived home from work, she was delighted to find me inside it preparing a propane-cooked dinner for two under its battery-powered lights.

I soon learned that the truck’s springs needed to be boosted to support the weight of the camper, a pair of extra-wide truck mirrors was needed, and tie-down bars to anchor the camper to the truck had to be installed; all this was expensive. To save money, I had a tie-down bar installed only in the front, not the back. If we had known the expense of modifying our truck, we would not have bought the camper.

Alan and Rose relieved our chores for a week while we drove north to visit Pearl’s other uncle and her grandparents. The heavy camper on the back of the light pickup with a manual transmission made driving in the mountains hard work. Our tempers flared as the overloaded rig swayed on the highway. Pearl kept hitting Whisky on the head to try to train him not to jump into the front seat and not to bark at everything he saw.

I turned on the stereo. Pearl turned the volume all the way up. She closed her eyes and listened to *Sultans of Swing* while Whisky cowered at the deafening blast. When the song was over, I reduced the volume.

1987: Metamorphosis

“I dreamed I was dancing,” Pearl signed, then she turned the volume all the way up to bone-rattling loudness and blocked the volume control with her hand. I reached for the switch and flicked it off.

“Why did you do that? I want to listen! I can’t watch TV because there are no TV stations here. It’s my right to listen!”

“I will turn on the stereo. You turn it up until you begin to hear it.”

Pearl turned the volume until it was all the way up. “Now I can hear.”

I turned it off. “I do not want to become deaf or have an accident.”

I looked in the mirror. “Police.” The patrol car’s lights flashed, so I pulled over. I rolled down the window as the policeman approached. Whisky barked and lunged at him as Pearl held him by the collar.

“Your license, registration, and insurance, please,” said the officer. “I clocked you at 15 over the limit going down the hill.”

I opened my document wallet and handed it to him; my Reserve Police ID card was opposite my driver’s license. He returned my wallet, made some small talk with me, walked back to his car, and drove off.

“No ticket. Before I quit the reserve police, I got a replacement card. I handed in the new one when I quit, and I kept the old one. Policemen don’t ticket policemen.” Pearl seemed unnerved by my subterfuge.

At the end of each day’s driving ordeal, we looked for a clearing at the end of a dirt road, and we hid from the world. We never stayed in public campgrounds, because we preferred the solitude of camping rough. For security, we carried the shotgun under the mattress, which was legal in those days. I mixed margaritas from the icebox. Pearl cooked dinner on the propane stove. We played with Whisky. We panned for gold in the Cariboo creeks. Pearl read *Cosmopolitan* and *Silent News* while I read books and listened to the plaintive call of the loons. It wasn’t easy to have sex in the low cab-over bed; “spoons” was the only position. This made it easy to continue to postpone having a family—tantric sex.

The highlight of our trip was our visit to Fort St. John to see her grandfather Dorse, her uncle Karl, and their wives, parking our camper in their driveways and sleeping in it. All were happy to see that Pearl had a respectable, hearing husband and that her life seemed to be going well.

Her maternal grandfather, Dorse, was one of the original settlers and farmers in the area, a fundamentalist man of God. I liked him. He was a

1987: Metamorphosis

proud and strict man, not the sort of man his children would want to cross. He was the co-founder of the World Invitational Gold Panning Championships, the Dorse Prosser Adventist Elementary School, and the Fort St. John North Peace Museum. He showed us the museum, and his home had even more settlers' artifacts. As a going-away present, he gave us the oak hand-cranked telephone which had hung on his kitchen wall and been in service for 30 years to communicate with friends and family 20 km away.

Uncle Karl's living room displayed a framed copy of the 1979 entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the "jade boulder Karl discovered in 1977 in Watson Lake. It weighs 63,307 pounds." In his back yard a green boulder stood next to a rock saw and piles of jade pieces. Pearl was proud of her uncle's discovery. Karl told us that he had been prospecting, mining, and carving Yukon jade and selling it to Alaska Highway tourists for years, and he'd hoped to sell his boulder in one piece, but no one had met his price so he was selling it in pieces. After ten years, about half had been sold. Karl gave us a fist-sized piece. Pearl reminded him that she was keen to start a home business to sell his jade. I realized that Pearl had no idea how the marketing and logistics might work because Karl had never taken it seriously and explained it.

I asked Karl so many questions about the economics of jade and the transportation of a 30-ton boulder that, out of sight of Pearl, he told me he hadn't *discovered* the jade for which he was briefly famous; a metal mine in Watson Lake had found it in a mineshaft, and he had bought it. He'd reported his "discovery" to Guinness as a marketing ploy.

I asked him why he never told Pearl the truth and used that chance to teach her about the jade trade. He excused himself by saying he never told Pearl he found it—she'd *read* it. Karl's jade was like Ernie's horsemeat: everyone in the family knew the truth, except Pearl, and her assumptions went uncorrected. I'm sorry to say that I didn't correct her, either, for fear she wouldn't believe me. But simplifying the world for her, as one does for children, only made reality more difficult to see.

On the last day of the trip, we took a gravel road near Lillooet. Because I had bought only one camper tie-down bar, when the truck pitched on a bad bump, the loose camper dented the roof of the cab. I

1987: Metamorphosis

had never seen Pearl so angry, and I became angry too—I had done all the planning, preparation, and driving, so I parked and told her to drive or stop complaining. She refused to do either; instead, she criticized me for controlling her. Except for our visits to her relatives, it was a miserable vacation and the last we ever took.

Pearl had become hypersensitive. Anything could trigger an argument, even Whisky's barking or my fingerspelling a new word and asking her the sign for it.

At home, she signed, "We should see a marriage counselor."

"A marriage counselor helps couples with *relationship* issues. First, you need to see a doctor about your *sensitivity*. I will come when your doctor wants me to come. Then, when you have seen a doctor and you feel better, then we can see a marriage counselor."*

It was a mistake not to have begun with any counselor of any kind, but I didn't realize Pearl was unable to go through life on her own.

Aug:

Borrowed Semen

"It's month four without the Pill, and I'm not pregnant, so you need to be tested. We can't waste any more time."

"Me? Let's be logical. You had surgery to your womb when you were 17; how do you know there was no damage there? I think you should get tested first."

"We will not have sex until I see a report about your semen."

"If you are so sure you can get pregnant, then you must have been pregnant before. You have no stretch marks, so you had an abortion."

Pearl was startled by my conjecture. "Yes. I got pregnant when I lived with Eddy. I told you he is an alcoholic with bad genes. I didn't want to marry him, so I had an abortion."

Pearl had no remorse that she had withheld a material fact from me for three years and no remorse that she had had an abortion—but I was

* In Canada, doctors, including psychiatrists, are free, but marriage counselors are not.

1987: Metamorphosis

no better because I was concealing my clandestine birth control from her. Pearl would not have chosen to live with an alcoholic and would not have had unprotected sex with a man unless she wanted his child. The way she said it—with five “I’s” in one sentence and no “we”—implied that she had aborted the child against her *de facto* second husband’s will, in which case Eddy was no more an alcoholic than her first husband was a homosexual. My concern about Pearl’s mental health increased.

“If he was an alcoholic, why did you live with him? And why did you keep your abortion a secret from me?”

“Don’t change the topic. No sex until your test. Your balls must be full.”

“What if I fail the test?”

“Then we adopt a black baby. White babies are not available.”

“To keep you happy, I will take a test.” I was delighted to book a test because “no sex until” created more opportunities to delay pregnancy.

I booked an appointment with our doctor for two weeks later. She was reluctant to authorize a semen test, which would be paid for by the government, and said that we should first try for nine months because the odds at our age after four months were only 50 percent. But Pearl talked her into it. I stalled for two more weeks before booking the test, and then waited another week to tell Pearl my result: normal.

I was stunned by Pearl’s response:

“The doctor must tell me, not you.” She had just accused me of lying.

At Pearl’s request, I made yet another appointment with our doctor. Two weeks later, in her office, the doctor told both of us the result, and she urged Pearl to be patient and to try for another six months.

That night, Pearl signed. “The lab didn’t see you shoot into the bottle, so you borrowed semen from a friend to hide your vasectomy.”

“Are you crazy? *Leo, would you jerk off for me?* No man would do it!”

Perhaps she believed me, because she didn’t mention infertility again. I’m sure we both knew we couldn’t go on like this, yet we both went on.

The ducks had grown up. I didn’t know how to hold and kill them alone, so we did it together. At first Pearl refused to help, but I reminded her that I bought them for her, we weren’t going to feed them forever,

1987: Metamorphosis

and it was illegal to release domestic ducks into the wild. So one of us had to hold each duck with its head on the stump, which served as a chopping block, and the other had to swing the ax. And we had to do it a dozen times—Pearl no longer wanted a duck in the garden.

Decapitation was easy; the hard part was avoiding being bruised while the headless duck flapped violently. After her elbow surgery, Pearl didn't want to swing the ax, so she was the one to get bruised. We didn't know the traditional technique of stuffing the bird in a sack with only its head sticking out of a hole.

Plucking the pinfeathers seemed to take forever. It took us all day and evening to convert the dead ducks into ready-to-cook broilers. Pearl's arms were bruised, and she was in a terrible mood—more delayed pregnancy. At least we didn't have to castrate the drakes.

I looked up from paying bills. "Where is your elbow report from the doctor? I need it for the insurance claim."

"Look in my bag. This morning, when I went to physiotherapy, they told me that the post office called them to discuss my elbow but the clinic refused to talk to them. They also told me the post office called our doctor about me, but she refused to talk to them, too. The post office is arguing with Worker's Compensation about my elbow."

As she requested, I looked in her bag for her medical report, and I found it. To my astonishment, I also found another doctor's letter:

Dear Mrs. King:

Re: Your Letter

Thank you for your interest in cochlear implants and your kind offer to be a research patient. We appreciate your confidence.

Please be advised that the procedure is still experimental and could result in total loss of hearing; therefore, we do not consider for experimental surgery any patients with any residual hearing, however minimal, such as yourself.

Cochlear implants are being improved in both efficacy and safety and we hope in the future to be able to aid you. Please find attached a description of cochlear implants.

Sincerely, Dr. H S Smith

Cochlear Implants

The cochlear implant is not a cure for deafness. It is a prosthetic device which allows detection of sound and supports speech reading cues, but the technology to date has not allowed anyone to comprehend speech purely through the implant.

1987: Metamorphosis

In normal hearing, sound waves travel along the external ear canal and cause the eardrum to vibrate. The three small bones of the middle ear conduct these vibrations to the snail-shaped cochlea of the inner ear. Hair cells extend along the length of the basilar membrane in the cochlea and, when vibrated, generate electrical activity in the auditory nerve fibers. Destruction of hair cells and the related degeneration of auditory nerve fibers result in hearing loss for most of the 250,000 people in the United States with profound deafness. For hearing-impaired individuals with sufficient residual hearing, classical hearing aids that simply amplify sound can be effective, but they offer no utility to the profoundly deaf.

Cochlear implants bypass the external and middle ears by using electrical stimulation of electrodes implanted in the cochlea to reintroduce the signals carried by auditory nerve fibers to the brain. A microphone in a hearing aid case is connected to a package of digital electronics called a sound processor. The sound processor translates the microphone signal into electrical stimuli that the brain interprets as sound. Months of follow-up listening, processor adjustment, and speech therapy follow the surgery. The goal of this technology is to elicit patterns of nerve activity that mimic those of a normal ear for a range of sounds. The processor is programmed by individual research and testing to give a sense of pitch to the sounds; however, this is, with current technology, far from normal.

Because cochlear implants do not give or restore normal hearing but can change a profoundly deaf person to the equivalent of a severely deaf person with some useful hearing, the decision on whether to be an oral deaf person, a signing deaf person, or an implantee with advanced aids must be given careful consideration; the decision is neither obvious nor casual. While the cochlear implant can provide access to sound, it cannot provide meaning; this needs to be learned as a child. Candidates are currently post-lingually deaf children and adults.*

We recommend that congenitally-deaf adults who have found their niche in the deaf community and live through sign language not pursue this option.

The letter was a month old. I put the elbow report and the letter on the table. When Pearl saw the letter, she became angry.

“Why did you take that letter?”

“Why did you keep it a secret?”

“You would try to prevent my implant. You prefer I stay deaf.”

That was the most painful thing Pearl had ever said to me. I didn't care that her thoughts on deafness were inconsistent, loving it and hating it, because if you have never had hearing, you can't know what it is. I worried that she thought I loved her deafness more than I loved her.

* The first cochlear implants in Canada were placed in four post-lingually deaf children, in November 1987, just a few months after Pearl's request.

1987: Metamorphosis

“What can I say to you? If I say I prefer a deafie, you will think I love you because you are deaf. If I say I prefer a hearie, you will think I don’t love you the way you are.

“I often lie in bed wishing I could do what my sisters did when they heard something—hear that sound and know what it is. Some Deafies say that implants are a threat to deaf culture because deafness is not a sickness to be cured, but I think hearing would be convenient, that’s all.”

Sep:

Death by Television

Pearl invited a dozen guests to her Labor Day long weekend deaf party. She asked them to bring sleeping bags to camp in our living room or in the hayloft rather than have to leave on the last ferry. I invited Stanley, Gertrude, and Ralph, but Stanley and Gertrude couldn’t come.

Ralph arrived first. At six o’clock he came up the driveway in his Suzuki jeep and, to my surprise, escorted a brunette to the door.

“You are right on time, Ralph,” I signed and said.

“Obsessive-compulsives are always on time. Adele, meet Pearl and Derrick.” Adele offered her hand for a handshake, and I realized she was blind. Pearl shook her hand, too, and we invited them inside.

Ralph guided Adele by the elbow into the kitchen. A flashlight hung from his belt.

“Don’t you trust my electricity?”

“I’d wear one if I were you—for when the time comes.” Ralph was referring to Teotwawki; everyone I knew seemed to be paranoid.

“You said Ralph was single,” signed Pearl.

“I was single, but we met on a blind date,” he said.

“I was Ralph’s Braille teacher,” said Adele. “I moved in with Ralph last month, after my youngest child moved out.”

“You guys talk while I unload the jeep.” Ralph went outside and returned with two suitcases and a carton labeled Baxter-Travenol.

Pearl looked at her watch. “I’ll go pick up my guests.”

I did the chores while Ralph and Adele walked around the property. Half an hour later, Pearl returned with her guests in the back of our

1987: Metamorphosis

truck. Jodi greeted me as I lowered the tailgate. The guests jumped down, each with booze and a sleeping bag. Whisky barked until he was introduced, and then he was delighted to have so many new friends.

As evening fell, we started a bonfire and roasted wieners. I baked potatoes on Pearl's propane barbecue. We laughed, signed, ate, and drank. Then Ralph, Adele, and I went inside to talk.

"It's better for us in here. The deafies don't have to slow down their ASL for me, and I don't have to interpret you for them."

"You can sign," said Adele, "so why don't you like to do it?"

I nodded without speaking, then, realizing my mistake, spoke without signing. "Even though I know enough sign language for her friends to talk to me when they want to, we don't have much to talk about. And if they slow down for me for too long, I know I'm imposing, like at a cosmopolitan party where the foreign guests are speaking English only to be polite."

"That's not good. If you have no mutual friends, there will be no one to help you stay as a couple through tough times," said Adele.

"I know, but it's hard. Pearl lives with one foot in the Vancouver deaf world and the other foot in the Bowen Island hearing world. She'd get lonely if she didn't work downtown, yet she wants have a kid and quit."

Bursts of laughter, the clinking of bottles, the smell of marijuana, and the crackle of burning wood came through the open windows and door—but not a single human voice, like a movie sound-effects track. Now and then, the plywood floor thundered from the impact of boots as revelers went to the refrigerator for beer. The sky turned purple.

"I didn't want to leave Bowen," said Ralph. "In our grandfathers' day, people worked with their hands and relaxed with their minds. Now we work with our minds and relax with our hands. Here, I had it all."

"Adele, did you know Ralph is looking at the girls?"

She laughed. "If I worried about things I can't see, I'd go crazy."

"Pearl worries about the things she can't hear, and she goes crazy."

"You said she wanted to start a business. What sort?" said Ralph.

"Selling jade from her uncle. Renting unfinished space in the house."

"I have another idea: build a shooting range, and start a gun club. Many people on Bowen Island shoot. I'm sure you can get permission

1987: Metamorphosis

for an underground range. Bury sewer pipe two meters down, add lights and ventilation, and there's your business! You can stock it with water, food, lights, radios, medicine, ammunition, and a Geiger counter, and there's your bomb shelter! The banker bunker! And, for more profit, you can rent it out for children's birthday parties."

Ralph was laughing, but he wasn't joking; at that time, the Soviet Union's economy was collapsing and it felt like anything could happen.* Ralph, Jeff, Virgil, Stanley, and all I held survivalist views, not as bunker-dwelling fanatics but as Scouts who wanted to "Be Prepared." To us, it made sense to keep the remote possibility of war or social upheaval in mind while making our other plans. Pearl had no interest in survivalism. Her disinterest may have come from her limited knowledge of history and current affairs, and may have been reinforced by *est* fatalism, but she loved the rural, back-to-the-land life to which survivalism was related.

"You can get an ultralight plane, store it in your barn, and use your upper field as an airstrip. There's *so* much you can do here on the hill."

"First, I'd need to clear the stumps from the upper field."

"Get a copy of the *Blaster's Handbook*. Get a blasting license; you just fill in the forms. After the reference check, buy dynamite, caps, and fuses. Bring them over on the weekly 'dangerous goods' ferry—you'll meet interesting people on *that* boat! You'll need a hand auger, some old carpets, and some old tires to keep the rocks from flying."

"That sounds like fun. Let's do that together someday."

Ralph looked at his watch. "It's time for an exchange." He went to the bedroom and returned with a suitcase, a handful of metal rods, and two plastic bags, one full of liquid and one empty. The suitcase was packed with hoses, valves, connectors in sealed plastic bags, and brown vials. Ralph put the bag of liquid in the microwave and, while it warmed, assembled the poles into a transfusion stand. He removed the bag from the microwave, felt its temperature, and hung it from the pole. He

* Survivalism would only fade after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Cold War ended. It would reappear ten years later among those with year 2000 "Y2K" paranoia.

1987: Metamorphosis

unfastened his khaki pants and pulled up his shirt to expose catheters on each side of his navel. He put on surgical gloves.

“I’m on Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis. Diabetics are prone to kidney disease, and I drew the short straw. Two liters of dialysate in my peritoneum washes out my poisons along with my vitamins. If I exchange it four times a day, take vitamin supplements, and eat bananas, I feel fine. If I don’t, I will die. I hate CAPD, but it beats spending half a day in a dialysis center chair twice a week.”

Ralph drew insulin into a syringe and pushed the needle into the injection port of the bag hanging from the rack. He took the caps off his catheters, disinfected them with iodine, and connected them with hoses to the bags. He put the empty bag on the floor and opened a valve; straw-colored liquid flowed out of his belly. Everyone who passed by on the way to the refrigerator stopped to stare.

Half an hour later, he closed the first valve and opened the second. Clear liquid ran from the bag on the stand into his belly. I couldn’t imagine living life like this, much of it dedicated to living another day.

Pearl walked in and stared at Ralph. “We are telling stories outside. What is Ralph doing? All my friends are asking me about him.”

“Ralph has kidney disease. He has to do this four times a day.”

Pearl walked out without a smile or a trace of empathy. Ralph disconnected and disinfected the catheters, closed his pants, and washed. We joined the party by the bonfire. Sparks rose into the sky like fireflies.

“The flames reach up to the trees,” I signed and said. “You might start a forest fire. Please let the fire go down.”

“Yes, sir!” signed a man, giving me a salute. He handed his joint to Ralph while he kicked dirt into the campfire. Ralph took a toke and passed me the joint. It was the second and last time Pearl saw me smoke.

“I want to put a deaf sticker on my car windshield,” signed Jodi. “I want police to know I am deaf, so they don’t shoot me. I asked a policeman, and he never heard of a deaf sticker like that.”

“I don’t like that idea,” signed Pearl. “If you put a deaf sticker on your car, you will have break-ins at your home.” She turned to me. “Come to the deaf war games weekend. Each team makes secret signs to communicate. You like to shoot, so you can be on our team. We always

1987: Metamorphosis

have a big party afterward. Two years ago, we were on TV.”

A man started laughing. “Yes! While the announcer was saying nice things about us, I stood behind him and was signing on TV, ‘We are goose-stepping with guns and hunting for Jews.’”

“No, I don’t point guns at people. Some Jews are deaf, too,” I signed.

“But Jews are oral deaf because they are rich,” the man signed.

Adele, Ralph, and I went inside. I put a Moody Blues cassette in the stereo and lit the kerosene lantern. We listened to “Melancholy Man.”

“Do you have a TV?” said Adele, who was sitting in front of the TV.

“Pearl has a TV. I don’t like it. There’s too much noise and violence.”

“I disagree,” said Ralph. “I think there isn’t *enough* violence on TV. There would be less violence in the real world if the imitation TV world would be more realistic. What happens when you kill on TV?”

“The victim falls over. Then Technicolor blood dribbles out.”

“Exactly! That’s not realistic. When a man is shot, he pisses, shits, convulses, and gets a hard-on! If TV did a better job of presenting death, there would be less killing in real life.”

In the morning, Adele sat with Ralph while he exchanged his fluids. I did the chores and woke the deafies sleeping in the hayloft. Pearl woke the deafies sleeping around the house and cooked a delicious breakfast of grilled chèvre with our homemade back bacon. She drove the deafies down to the ferry. Then the four of us sat down to talk.

“Did you ever talk to a blind woman before?” Ralph asked Pearl.

“I talked to deaf-blind in school using hand-spelling but not blind.”

“Me, too,” said Adele, “deaf-blind but not deaf-only. You and I could talk using hand-spelling, but it is much faster to have Derrick interpret. It is hard for me to imagine life without ears. Let me try. What do you feel when you hold a cat that is purring?”

“When I hold a cat that is purring, I hear it purring in my mind. When I take my hands off the cat, then I don’t hear it purring. This morning, I heard the bacon frying in the pan, but when I looked away, I didn’t hear it. If I watch a television show that’s captioned, I hear the words, but if I look away, I hear nothing. Get it?”

“I think so. When people are talking, I can see them in my mind, but when they are silent, I don’t see them anymore. Can you speak?”

1987: Metamorphosis

“A little, but I gave up. It frustrated me that most hearing people can’t understand my speech after I learned it in school. It is hard to talk when you can’t hear what you are saying.”

“Deafies believe deafness is only an inconvenience,” I signed and said.

“Yes. For example, I can drive, but I can’t use the telephone.”

“I can use the telephone, but I can’t drive!” said Adele.

“Did you ever see?” I signed and said.

“I had a normal childhood, but I went blind through illness. I had my eyes removed when there wasn’t enough vision left to compensate for the pain. My ex-husband was sighted.” Adele held Ralph’s hand. “The kids helped me after he left me. I don’t know what I would have done without them. Do you love Pearl because she is quiet?”

I laughed. “Pearl doesn’t realize how much noise she makes.”

“Why didn’t you join us outside for a longer time? My friends think you only came outside to give us instructions.”

“You enjoyed looking at the fire, and we enjoyed listening to music. It is important that we all enjoy ourselves in our own way,” said Adele.

“Say, since you have only a two-wheel-drive truck, why don’t you get a four-wheel drive jeep, too?” Ralph said. “Don Robson bought the last decommissioned Willys jeeps. Two grand will buy you a mil-spec jeep that will climb a 70 percent grade, pull stumps, and haul logs.”

“That is a cheap and good idea,” signed Pearl. “No more up-and-down trips to pick each other up. No more hitchhiking. Let’s see one.”

I came home while Pearl was doing chores and saw the lamp flashing on our answering machine. I pushed the button, heard a missed-call message, and reset the machine.

At dinner, I took a book from my briefcase. “I got this at the used bookstore: the *CIL Blaster’s Handbook*. Ralph and I are going to clear the stumps in the field with dynamite.”

“What was the message on the answering machine?”

“There was no message on the answering machine.”

Pearl erupted in anger. “You lie! I came home, and I played it. No words appeared on the TTY, so I put my hand on the speaker and felt a voice. I felt it! I *demand* to know your secret message.”

1987: Metamorphosis

“It said, ‘*This is a recording. Please hang up your set. If you need assistance, dial your operator. Please hang up now.*’ Don’t you trust me?”

I was always looking for gifts for Pearl, so when I was flipping through the Paladin Press catalog that arrived with *Get Even*, I reread the advertisement for *Slash and Thrust*, by John Sanchez. The catalog recommended it for self-defense for women. Pearl had a dog, a gun, and an autodialer, but these only protected her when she was at home, and her past assaults had all taken place away from home. During one of our first dates, she told me that a policeman had taught her self-defense by eye-poking and that she was planning to study taekwondo, but martial arts seemed useless to me. We both carried a pocketknife. If this book would help Pearl feel less vulnerable, then she might feel less paranoid.

I couldn’t be sure if the book would be useful for Pearl until I saw it, but it was cheap, so after it came I would decide whether or not to give it to her for Christmas. I ordered four books from the catalog: *Slash and Thrust*, the survivalist book Jeff had suggested, a book on how to make a silencer as Ralph had suggested, and a first-aid book. The charges appeared on our credit card bill. My order wasn’t a secret, only the titles.

Pearl bought a children’s ice-cream maker shaped like a penguin. *Age three and up*, it said on the box. I was astonished when Pearl said it was for our children. I smiled and said nothing.

A few weeks later, I discovered that Pearl had secretly changed her dentist. I showed her the charge on our credit card bill and said that if she had found a better dentist, she should tell me so I could change, too.

“I have the right to have my own dentist,” was her reply.

Her words and actions made me think that Pearl was planning to run and hide, as she had run from others before me, and she didn’t want to share suppliers with me lest they reveal her future whereabouts to me.

Oct:

Book Panic, Car Terror

Summer faded into autumn, and the Bowen Island air became scented with woodstove smoke. I hired a helper to assist me to slaughter our three pigs. The following day, Pearl and I butchered 200 kilograms of

1987: Metamorphosis

pork—almost double our own weight, a thousand servings. After 16 hours of cutting and wrapping, our freezer was full and our arms and backs were sore. The rest of the week, we made bacon and sausages. We sold pork to our friends and coworkers.

Alan hauled the lambs away in his yellow Volvo to be slaughtered and butchered. Pearl spread rye seed in the fields while I stacked ten tons of hay, delivered by semi-trailer. Working on our property minimized the tension between us, for every conversation seemed to end in a misunderstanding, an accusation, and a quarrel. Our sex life was fading away. I knew something was going to happen. We lived from day to day.

As Ralph had suggested, Pearl and I met Ralph and Adele at the four-wheel drive garage and test-drove the last few Willys jeeps to be decommissioned by the Armed Forces. All had open sides, canvas tops, and camouflage paint. We bought one, an M38A1, 20 years old. I drove it home, laying a trail of blue smoke. Pearl followed me in our truck.

I was astounded when Pearl then refused to drive it, ever.

“I say no. A jeep is not for a woman.”

“Why didn’t you say you would never drive it *before* we bought it?”

“There is no problem. I will drive the truck while you drive the jeep.”

“I need the truck to go to classes. I can’t drive a jeep in my suit.”

“I will hitchhike on your MBA nights, the same as now. This is your last year to finish your MBA.”

The way Pearl wanted us to buy a second vehicle *with no intention to drive it herself* reinforced my concern that she was planning to leave.

“Then we should not have bought the jeep. This is a big mistake. I think we need to have the marriage counseling you suggested.”

“It won’t help. You have to be honest. You were not like this before,” she signed.

“You wanted marriage counseling, but now you say no. Why?”

“We can go after you are honest with yourself. I am watching you.”

We drove our jeep to my parents’ house on a cold afternoon. Its heater warmed our feet, but we were shivering by the time we arrived. Father offered to lend us his spare car, an Oldsmobile Delta 88 Turbo Hydra-Matic, for the winter. It was a 20-year-old monster only his generation

1987: Metamorphosis

could appreciate. We now had a pickup, a jeep, and a rusty, musty two-ton tank. Pearl happily drove it home while I shivered in the open jeep.

Alan sold Yarby. With only four sheep, three horses, two goats, and a cat in the barn, and all the pigs, lambs, kids, and ducks in our chest freezer, our farm chores eased for the winter.

I was astonished again when, on Halloween, Pearl brought a pumpkin and bags of candies home. "You empty the pumpkin. I will carve the face. We will put it by the driveway next to the road. Children will ask for our candies if we have a good pumpkin."

"No kids came for trick-or-treat in the past two years. The driveway is steep and dark. And we have *Beware of Dog* and *No Trespassing* signs."

Pearl carved a Jack-o'-Lantern and put a candle in it. I carried it down the driveway and put it next to the road for her. It looked wonderful there, but no children paid us a visit, so Pearl ate the candies.

On 4 November, before dawn, Pearl ate breakfast while I did the chores. I listened to the foghorns echoing across Howe Sound. I heard the Oldsmobile rumble into life and, through the barn doors, watched its headlight beams climb to the top of the trees as Pearl crested the driveway on her way to the cove. An hour later, I drove the truck to the cove, expecting to park it by the Oldsmobile, but I didn't see the car.

During dinner, Pearl signed impassively, "The car broke down this morning near our driveway. I hitchhiked to the cove and asked the gas station to tow it there. They already fixed it. I am telling you so you are not upset by the credit card bill."

"What was wrong with the car?"

"The battery wires touched together."

"That's all? I could have fixed it. Why didn't you walk up the driveway and get me? I was still at home. We could use the jeep to tow it to the house, and I could fix it here. A waste of money!"

Pearl stared through me. "It was dark."

"It's always *dark* in the morning. That's why we have flashlights."

On the weekend, I drove to Leigh Automotive, the Chevron station in Snug Cove. While Don refueled the jeep, I said, "Pearl had the Oldsmobile towed here and repaired on Wednesday. What's the story?"

1987: Metamorphosis

“Your battery cage rusted out, so the battery tipped over and shorted to the engine block. I welded a new cage and charged her 75 bucks for the towing and repair. Pearl wanted to pay cash but she didn’t have enough money, so she charged it to her credit card. It was a simple repair, and that’s what I reported to Laurent.”

“Laurent? What did the police have to do with this?”

“Laurent asked me to give your car a safety check,” Don looked over his shoulder, then whispered, “He asked me to check it for sabotage. He asked me not to tell you, but you need to know.”

I was stunned. “Sabotage! What did you say after your safety-check?”

“No sabotage, but only God knows what rusty part will fall out next.”

In the afternoon, I saw Laurent’s jeep parked at the General Store, and I parked next to it. He walked out of the store and told me to get in. He started the motor for heat and privacy, and said, “At 5:30, Pearl’s car broke down as she left your driveway. The engine, lights, steering, and brakes shut down, and she saw sparks under the hood. A commuter from Bluewater saw Pearl standing in the road waving a flashlight. He stopped to give her a lift and then saw your car. Pearl had been standing quite a distance from it, he told me. He put on his four-way flashers and, with the help of the next car to come by, pushed that heap of junk onto the shoulder because it was blocking the road. He gave her a lift to the ferry but she turned and walked to where I was parked, so she missed it. She reported the breakdown to me and asked me to have it towed to the gas station for repair. Then she went to work on the second ferry.”

“I was on that second ferry. She knew that, so she must have stayed outside in the cold or hidden in the smoking lounge. She was hiding.”

“Pearl asked me to keep it a secret, but she wanted your car checked for sabotage. I asked Don to do that. Don’t tell her I told you.”

Pearl put our mail on the table. All of it had been opened. There were the paperbacks I had ordered—postmarked a month ago.

“You didn’t tell me you ordered these books.”

“You spoiled my gift. *Slash and Thrust* was for you, for Christmas. It teaches you how to protect yourself with your pocketknife in case a man assaults you. *Home Workshop Silencers* is for shooting a deer by the barn;

1987: Metamorphosis

I told you about Ralph's idea before. The *Medical Handbook* is first-aid. Jeff mentioned *Life After Doomsday* to me, and it looked interesting."

Except for the *Medical Handbook*, they were mail-order swindles* like *Get Even*, and, later, I told Pearl so. Even *Life After Doomsday* was poor, despite having been reviewed by the *New York Times* and *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* and selling hundreds of thousands of copies.

Dec:

Arrest Derrick!

I drove the truck to work so we could buy provisions on our way home. After work, we bought groceries and animal feed. Although Pearl's behavior was increasingly odd, I continued speaking to her normally, as if speaking to her normally would guide her to thinking normally.

"Shall we eat in Horseshoe Bay tonight? It's so cold tonight that the ice cream won't melt in the truck."

"Our house will be cold because we will build the fire too late. What about the horses?"

"They can wait. The owners never visit their horses on cold nights."

Pearl shrugged. "We can eat out if you want."

We ate in the upscale Bay Moorings restaurant, at a table with a view of the marina. I ordered margaritas.

"How did you know about this place?"

"Leo and I used to eat here for half price when we were on patrol. Is something bothering you?"

"Your ASL does not improve. Your eyes wander. When you look away, I look there too, thinking something is happening over there. You never ask me, 'How was your day?'"

"I am avoiding arguments. We need to sign like we did before we got so busy."

"You don't take time to explain to me why you are doing things. You expect me to follow you."

* After the Internet made trash available for free, Paladin Press went out of business.

1987: Metamorphosis

“I often wonder what you are thinking, too. I will try to communicate more, but we have to love each other as we are.”

“Why didn’t you choose a hearie wife who can communicate with you in big words? It makes me suspect why you chose a deafie wife.”

“Because I love *you*, not big words.”

Pearl put her head on her hands and watched a ferry disappear around the point. She was still gazing at the ripples of water when the meal arrived.

“Is something bothering you?” I asked again.

The question hung in the air, and we ate without signing.

When our ferry rounded the point, she signed. “Let’s go. We must unload the truck and put wood on the fire.”

On the way home, I paused at the Oldsmobile parked in the cove so Pearl could drive it home. I drove home, changed, did the chores, and unloaded the sacks of feed in the barn. It was just above freezing.

When I walked back to the house, Pearl wasn’t home, so no fire was burning, and the house was cold. I worried that the Oldsmobile had broken down again, so I drove to the cove in my farm clothes. The Oldsmobile was gone. I drove home slowly, looking for it at the sides of the roads. There were no streetlights on Bowen Island.

Suddenly, the flashing blue emergency lights of the RCMP jeep came up behind me, and it rocketed past. I wondered where Laurent was going so quickly on a Friday night. I kept driving slowly, looking for Pearl. I couldn’t find her, so I went home to call the police. As I crested the driveway, my truck’s headlights came down to rest on Laurent’s jeep.

Laurent stood in the kitchen. Pearl stood to his side and behind him. She looked agitated, explosive, and dangerous.

“Hello, Laurent. What’s up?” I said without signing.

“Interpret!” demanded Pearl.

“Hello, Laurent. What’s happening?” I signed and said.

“Your lips said something different! You must interpret exactly!”

“Hello, Laurent. What is up?” I signed exactly, pointing up. The literal expression makes no more sense in ASL than it does in English.

“Derrick, Pearl asked me to arrest you for trying to kill her.”

1987: Metamorphosis

My head started spinning. “Why?” was all I could say.

“Interpret!” signed Pearl. I was the interpreter at my own inquisition.

“Are you trying to kill Pearl?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“She’s convinced you are.”

“Arrest him!”

“I need reasonable and probable grounds to believe you have been threatened by Derrick. When did he try to kill you?”

“Many times!” she screamed silently through wild signs, fury on her face. “The first time was firewood. He told me to put the wood in the truck. He rolled the wood down the hill to the truck. Firewood rolled into me and hurt me and bruised me.”

“It was easier to roll the wood than to carry it. I wasn’t aiming at her.”

“Rolling firewood isn’t going to kill anyone.”

“He made me fall off the roof!”

“Did he push you off the roof?”

“No, he is too clever for that. He made the ladder break!”

I told the story of the ladder collapse two years ago. “That’s the ladder, over there. Look for yourself. After it buckled, I reinforced it with wood, and both of us have been using it ever since.”

“Derrick was on the roof when it broke, so it wasn’t deliberate. If he wanted to kill you, he would have shoved you off and climbed down the ladder.”

Pearl shook her head violently. “No! No! No! He tried to kill me with electricity. He told me to hold wires when the power was on!”

“Is that so?”

“*Insulated* wires. The kitchen lights are on the same circuit, and we were working at night, so I needed to leave that circuit on so we could see what we were doing. She was helping me in the attic on dry wood. She was perfectly safe.”

“And the car? You know about that!” She was getting hysterical.

“It’s falling apart. Did you tell Derrick about your concerns?”

“No! I didn’t want him to find out that I discovered his plan.”

“Pearl, *why* do you think Derrick is trying to kill you?”

“I don’t know why because he is too smart. He is in Mensa.”

1987: Metamorphosis

“It’s a social club. We drink and we talk.”

Pearl made a sign like a screw boring into her head. She went to our bookshelf and brought back *Get Even*, *Slash and Thrust*, *The Blaster’s Handbook*, *Life After Doomsday*, and *Home Workshop Silencers*. “Look!”

“What are you going to do with a silencer?”

“Shoot animals without disturbing anyone.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t for Frank?”

“No. *Get Even* was for Frank. *Slash and Thrust* was supposed to be a Christmas gift, for her self-defense, but she opened my mail.”

“Now I understand why his first wife left him. She was afraid!”

“Afraid of *what*?” I signed and said.

“You know!”

Laurent rubbed his hands. “Better get some firewood burning.”

Laurent and Pearl were scribbling notes when I returned from stoking the stove.

“Pearl she says you and Ralph talked about killing.”

Pearl sneered. “Remember the party? You never talked to Dibs, so you didn’t know he isn’t deaf; he is hard-of-hearing. We wanted to know what the hearies were talking about, so he listened to you all while he was getting a beer. Everyone was shocked when he told us about your idea to show death on TV. I was so embarrassed!”

“Ralph wanted to make the world less violent. He said if people knew about death, they wouldn’t want to kill. Why didn’t you say so when we talked with Ralph and Adele the next day?”

Pearl ran to the bedroom and returned with my machete and holster, but Laurent wasn’t interested.

“Mexican souvenirs,” I signed and said.

“Ralph carries his gun in his jeep.”

“Did you see Ralph in his jeep with a gun?”

“No. Derrick told me about it.”

“It’s legal. I approved his Permit to Convey.”

Pearl showed Laurent my Pocket Day-Timer. “It’s in code!”

“I abbreviate. Do I need to write out my appointments in full so Pearl can audit them?”

“Derrick stopped computer budgeting. Hundreds of dollars come

1987: Metamorphosis

into our bank account, but where does the money come from?”

“From my expense claims from work; you can see the same amounts going *out* one month before in the credit card bill.”

“I caught him listening to messages on the answering machine and then erasing them.”

“Messages like *This is a recording.*” I signed and said in a nasal voice.

“He doesn’t wear any ring. He doesn’t keep my photo in his wallet. He rides with Leo, and he goes to the YMCA. I think he’s gay.”

“Your photo riding Yarby is on my desk at work.”

“His glasses make him look like a drug dealer. His friends are weird—Ralph, Leo, Virgil, Stanley, Julian, Kostas, Rokus—all weird!”

“Everyone I know is weird—except Pearl.”

Larson faced Pearl. “Derrick is a capable man. If he wanted to kill you, you’d be dead by now. I can’t arrest him. All I have from you is innuendo.” I fingerspelled “innuendo.”

“What is ‘innuendo?’”

I had had enough. “Look it up in the dictionary.” I crossed my arms.

Laurent looked at his watch. “The water taxi leaves in 30 minutes. I’ll drive you to the dock. Can you stay with friends in town?”

Pearl nodded. She ran around the house, tossing items into her backpack.

As she turned to leave, I signed, “Get help—you need it.”

“Nothing is wrong with me!” Pearl burst into tears.

“I *hate* domestic disputes,” said Laurent, as he followed her out the door.

They drove into the night. I stood at the door, in shock. I was repelled by the Pearl I now saw while longing for the Pearl I once knew.

It was 4 December, 20 days before our second anniversary.

I tried to call Jodi, who lived with Gavin, but his number was unlisted; that suggested poor character in the days when an unlisted number cost a substantial monthly fee. I called Jeff, told him what had happened, and asked him for Gavin’s number. I was stunned when Jeff refused to give it to me, and he seemed to give up on her. His last words to me were, “I think it’s time for me to hang up my Pearl connection.”

1987: Metamorphosis

I remembered Fanny, the interpreter friend of Pearl's whom I had met four years ago but hadn't seen since. Perhaps she could suggest how I could help Pearl. I found her number in the phone book, called her, and told her what had happened.

"I expected trouble like this. Deafies can be distrustful."

"Trying to have me arrested goes beyond distrust, don't you think?"

"Pearl is paranoid. I am one of the few hearies she sometimes trusts. I hadn't seen her for a year, but when your new books arrived, she came to show them to me. She was in shock! She thought you planned to kill her and your books were your research into the means. She asked me if it were safe for her to deliver your mail, and I said yes."

"*Slash and Thrust* was to be her Christmas gift. The catalog had been on the table for years."

"If you had told her beforehand, those books might not have been a problem, but in her mind, *surprise* equals *secret* equals *danger*. She loses control of herself when she's not in control of her environment. When she lived here, she accused me of stealing her tax refund. When her check arrived in the mail, she said she trusted me again—but did she? She might have thought I waited to see if she would notice it before I cashed it myself. That's the way Pearl's mind works. Earning her trust will probably take more time than you have left with her."

"Can you see her? If anyone can guide her back to reality, it's you."

"There is nothing I can do until she calls me. If I call her now, she'll know you called me, and that will be the end of her trust in me."

I called Eugénie and told her what happened.

"Well, I'll be damned," she said, in one of her favorite phrases.

"Pearl liked you. Could you have a heart-to-heart talk with her? I think she'll be at Jodi's tonight, around the corner from you. You'll remember her from Wreck Beach. Tell Pearl, or Jodi if Pearl isn't there, why you left me. Please do it for her."

"All right, but she might not recognize me in clothes. Lunch soon?"

"It's a deal."

I called my father. "Son, the minority world is tough. It leads some to excel, some to complain while on the dole, and some to end up bent. Let us know if there is any way to help. And thank God she isn't pregnant."

1987: Metamorphosis

Eugénie called back. “I just saw Pearl at Jodi’s.”

“Thank you! What did she say?”

“She was wound up as tight as a drum. At first, Jodi didn’t want to let me in, but I talked her into it. When Pearl entered the room, she wasn’t interested in discussing anything. I think your ability to influence her life even after she walked out, like sending me there, distressed her. I told her that my leaving you had nothing to do with you and everything to do with me. Pearl said only that she doesn’t want to see you again.”

“I see. I’m not going to tell anyone what happened. Otherwise, if she returns, it will make her recovery harder. Did you tell her why you left?”

“She didn’t want to know. I said you are only a hazard to yourself.”

“I do get myself into predicaments, don’t I?”

“I thanked her for signing for our divorce. Lunch on Monday?”

That weekend, I kept myself busy, with tools in my hands and Whisky at my side. I hoped that Pearl would discuss her feelings with her family and they would help her. I knew I would be taking a risk if Pearl returned without accepting that she had a problem and agreeing to psychotherapy—it was only a matter of time before she had more delusions and disappeared, or even became dangerous; she had spoken about revenge as if it were justified whenever hearies wronged deafies. Nevertheless, I resolved to take her back unconditionally.

I was still so stunned by her accusations that I couldn’t see how much Pearl must have been suffering in order to develop, to live with, and to act on her bizarre thoughts. Why had her friends been neutral? Did they believe Pearl’s stories? Did they know something I didn’t know? If they believed her, they were fools, but if they didn’t believe her *and* they didn’t try to help her, then they weren’t friends.

I thought of calling her mother, but I worried that if I did, Pearl would never trust me again. Pearl had always had a strained relationship with her mother, so there was no family support network where our parents would cooperate for the sake of their future grandchildren.

On Monday, at work, I could hardly function. I called our doctor, who gave me an immediate appointment.

“I think the world of Pearl,” she said, “but after your fertility test

1987: Metamorphosis

episode, this episode doesn't surprise me. Try calling Dr. Foreman, a signing psychiatrist. If she calls me, I'll help, but I doubt she will because I'm also your doctor and therefore part of the greater conspiracy."

I telephoned Dr. Foreman and asked for his help. "This is an interesting case. I can hear the lump in your throat through the telephone. I am booked for two months, but I will ask my colleague, Dr. Sholokhov, to see you." Sholokhov agreed to see me right away.

In his office, I told him what I knew about Pearl's past and present.

"Divorces often cause spouses to think their partners want to do them in, but rarely is it the other way around. I won't diagnose Pearl without meeting her, but it sounds like she is responding abnormally to normal situations, and so she is struggling with a personality disorder of some kind. Dr. Forman's research for Gallaudet has shown that deaf children are far more likely than others to develop behavioral problems, and one in four has moderate to severe psychiatric issues. If her delusions and volatility are caused by past traumatic experiences, then Cognitive Behavioral Therapy might help her to reconnect with reality if she is willing to try it. Does she chew her nails?"

"Yes! I have *never* seen her with full fingernails. We've tried Tabasco, garlic, manicures, nagging, and cotton gloves. Nothing worked."

"That's a sign of anxiety. Most deaf people enjoy their lives as much as anyone, but deaf people who are anxious are more likely to develop paranoia because the communications gap makes it hard for them to trust hearing people. If she has become paranoid, she views your love as an attempt to exploit her. New experiences only reinforce her old beliefs. However, as long as her conscious mind was focused on a powerful goal, such as having a child, she could suppress her subconscious. Perhaps the question is not why Pearl ran away but why she was able to give you three years. You must have been good to her."

"Pearl gave her last two partners three years, too."

"If her delusions and volatility have existed so long, there is another possibility: schizophrenia. I don't think she has schizophrenia because she is able to work, and she hasn't been violent. How old was she when her delusions began?"

"In her teens, Pearl starting thinking her mother killed her father.

1987: Metamorphosis

That's all I know. Her family hasn't said anything about her history."

"I'm sorry to say, but family silence is a schizophrenia indicator."

"What is schizophrenia?"

"It's a brain disease characterized by a distorted perception of reality that leads to life-disrupting behavioral problems. It is biochemical with an inherited foundation, but it also takes environmental factors to launch it. Sufferers usually develop it in their teens. There is no test for it. Diagnosis is based on history and interviews. It changes their personalities, reduces their abilities, and shortens their lifespans by a decade. Have any family members ever been diagnosed with a mental illness? Or convicted? Most convicts have at least one mental illness."

"Not on her mother's side, but I know nothing about her father's family. I never met any of his family."

"Congenital rubella—German measles—deafness, discrimination, loss of a parent in childhood, trauma, and family dysfunction are environmental factors."

"Pearl has most of those. Could you help her if she saw you?"

"Not until she accepts that she has a problem that is damaging her life. A good psychiatrist with willing patients can make a significant improvement in a third, make some improvement in a third, and make no improvement in the other third. The patient's willingness and trust are the keys, but paranoid people are hypersensitive to what they can't help but think are lies. If she has schizophrenia, we have drugs that should stabilize her thinking, but antipsychotic drugs have side effects and will have to be taken for the rest of her life. She is unlikely to take them voluntarily. In the meantime, I suggest you take care of yourself."

"May I make an appointment with you for Pearl and me?"

"Dr. Foreman is your best choice because he can sign."

Pearl's behavior made more sense to me now, but I began to feel less hope for Pearl and our relationship. I tried to help make things right, so I booked a series of appointments for us with Dr. Foreman starting in two months, his earliest available slots.

At lunchtime, I bought a dozen red roses and wrote on the gift card:

Pearl, I love you. Please, get help. You need it. Love, Derrick.

1987: Metamorphosis

I cared enough for Pearl to say what had to be said, and no one else seemed to be saying. I drove to Jodi's. She opened the door and stood in the doorway, magnificently pregnant.

"Congratulations on your baby. Is Pearl here?"

"Pearl is not here."

"I need to see Pearl. Please give her these flowers."

"If she comes, I will give them to her."

"Thanks. But I would love to give them to Pearl myself."

A smile appeared on Jodi's lips. "Pearl doesn't want to see you."

"Tell Pearl I love her." I handed the bouquet to Jodi and left.

That weekend, I drove the jeep to my parents' home, for dinner.

My mother said, "I wanted to help, so I called Pearl's mother. I'd never called her before. You know we only met them once. Now listen to this: her mother said her first marriage ended the same way. I was appalled and furious that she only told us this now, but I tried hard not to sound angry. It was the shortest call I ever had."

I was stunned—none of her family members had warned me about her past behavior. I accepted they didn't want to cut off any opportunity for Pearl, but their failure to advise me about what to expect only made life worse for everyone, including her, because I wouldn't be able to optimize my behavior because I wouldn't realize what was going on.

Everything Is Different

Two weeks after Pearl left, on Friday night, I received a TTY call:

DERRICK HERE GA

PEARL HERE HA GA

I LOVE YOU GA

PLEASE COME AND GET ME GA

YES WHERE ARE YOU GA

AT MOTHERS HOUSE I MUST LEAVE TONIGHT PICK ME UP GA

THE LAST FERRY IS ALREADY GONE I WILL ASK MY FATHER TO
PICK YOU UP YOU CAN SLEEP WITH THEM OVERNIGHT AND THEN
COME HOME TOMORROW GA

OK I WILL WAIT FOR YOUR FATHER GA

1987: Metamorphosis

WONDERFUL I LOVE YOU SK

I was overjoyed! I called my father. He was happy to collect Pearl. After two anxious hours, my mother called. "Pearl's here! Your father drove so fast, he was stopped for speeding. He told the cop he was rushing to help a mentally-ill woman, so he let your father off!"

I was happy that Pearl was in loving hands, and I hoped her recovery might begin. "Did Father speak to Pearl's mother?"

"No. Pearl was standing outside in a leather jacket on a winter's night! She was still shivering when she arrived here. I made her some Ovaltine, and we had a short conversation. 'Why are you doing this?' I said. 'I don't feel safe,' she said. 'Derrick loves you,' I said. I said you aren't dangerous ... but she didn't believe me."

"If she thinks I'm dangerous, then why did she call me tonight?"

"Because her mother threw her out! I said you're like us; we can't hurt anybody. She started to cry, so I hugged her. I lent her a nightgown, and when she came out of the bathroom, I kissed her and tucked her into bed. She seemed relaxed, but she kept the notepaper."

"What was the look on her face?"

"Distant. Lydia's husband said the look in Pearl's eyes scared him."

I paced the floor. I tossed all the Paladin books, my Mexican holster, and the vial Virgil had given me into the stove. I removed these irritants from her as if I were a parent separating allergens from a child.

In the morning, my father called to say he was about to drive Pearl to Horseshoe Bay, where he would drop her off at the ferry. Pearl did not want me to pick her up when she walked off the ferry, he said. I'd been hoping all night that Pearl was coming home to *me*, not only to the house, so that was disappointing news.

Two hours later, Pearl walked in the door; she was the only visitor who could surprise me because she was the only visitor at whom Whisky wouldn't bark. I told Pearl I loved her. I hugged her, but she felt limp. She was wearing a new and expensive sheepskin bomber jacket. Despite her haggard face, I told her how beautiful she looked.

"Gavin told me to leave. Then Mother told me to leave. I was curious if you would help me."

1987: Metamorphosis

Curious! Her words hurt. I realized she had come home because she had nowhere else to go, and it was free.

“I will always help you. Are you back home to stay?”

“I need to think about it. It is my turn to do the chores.”

My office Christmas party was the next day. Pearl came with me, but she ignored me except when she needed an interpreter, and she avoided having her photo taken. It was obvious to everyone that our marriage was on the rocks, even though I had told no one.

We worked on the house with renewed vigor, especially Pearl, as if she wanted to have as much of it completed as possible before it was sold. While drywalling, sanding, or painting, we were relaxed because we each knew what the other was doing, but when we were out of sight, we each wondered what the other was up to. We were living apart together.

I did my best to calm Pearl and show her my love. I sat next to her while she watched television. I held her hand while walking. I took her on a Bowen Nature Club cruise around Howe Sound to see the seals, puffins, and whales. I thought that if she had come back home after consulting with her family and friends and was sleeping with me, then she had concluded that she was safe and there was no reason to leave.

But her behavior had changed. She slept with her purse and kept it in view at all other times. She delayed depositing her paycheck into our account until the day before the mortgage was due. She removed the telephone bills from our mailbox so I couldn't see the numbers she'd called, so I went to the telephone company and got copies, to pay them. She progressed from fingernail-gnawing to junk-food munching. Her face was aging, and her figure was disappearing.

Pearl mentioned casually, as if it were none of my business, that she had an appointment with “a counselor” that her friend had recommended. I needed to drive the truck to Vancouver, so I offered to drop her off. At first she declined, but then she must have realized that her refusal looked odd, so she accepted. She wouldn't give me the exact address, only a nearby intersection. When I dropped her off there, she stood at the intersection until I drove out of sight.

During dinner, the telephone rang. I heard a TTY, and told Pearl the

1987: Metamorphosis

call was for her. I put the handset on the kitchen counter because she had to pick up the second phone in the visitors' room before I hung up the first phone, or else the connection would drop. Pearl walked to the visitors' room to use the TTY, and, for the first time, she closed the door behind her. Her purse lay on the counter. I had only to glance in it to see the missing telephone bills along with a card for a Resource Centre for Abused Women; its address was where Pearl had gone for her appointment with "a counselor". When she came back after her call, she saw me sitting at the table, and she looked at the counter.

"Why didn't you hang up the telephone?"

"Because I forgot. Please hang it up now."

"You were listening to my conversation. I caught you!"

"No one can understand TTY tones. You need a machine for that."

"I know you listened to me! How much did you understand?"

"Call your interpreter friends. Ask if they understand TTY tones."

She took her purse to the visitors' room and returned a few minutes later, now calm. "I called the Message Relay Centre. They said normal people can't understand TTY tones. But you are not normal."

The telephone rang again. "May I speak to Pearl?"

"No, you can't speak to her. She's deaf."

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry. I'm calling about the house for rent."

"A woman is calling about a house for rent."

Pearl shrugged. "I'm not interested."

"She's not interested." I hung up. "What was that call about?"

"That is my business." Pearl crossed her arms.

Pearl surprised me with a visit to my office. She didn't come to my desk, as usual, but stood at our reception counter.

"Why did the bank refuse to talk to me about our time deposit?"

"Our deposit certificate is at home. What do you want to know?"

"I wanted to discuss it with them, but it is in your name only."

"Yes, of course. Otherwise, you would need to come to the bank and sign a new one every time the old one matured. We are married, so it doesn't matter whose name is on anything."

"You must prove it. Come to the bank downstairs with me now!"

1987: Metamorphosis

I went to the bank with Pearl to satisfy her that our time deposit, worth less than her ring, was there. It was obvious she was preparing to separate, but there was nothing I could do but follow along and help.

On her 34th birthday, I took Pearl to the sushi restaurant near my condo, where we had eaten when our adventure began. We sat in a private *tatami* room.

“It is so cold outside, the streetlights have halos like angels.” Pearl rubbed her hands together.

“This restaurant reminds me of our past happiness. Remember when we ate here, motorcycled, scuba-dived, and made love on the carpet?”

She nodded without a smile. “Everything is different now.”

“I don’t understand why everything is different now.”

“Yesterday, I was shocked when I discovered everyone in your office knew we had a marriage problem. You said you would not tell them, but you told everybody. I know you told them because everyone was staring at me to see which hand I was wearing my wedding ring on.”

“No. I had to tell my boss, but I didn’t tell anyone else. I’m sorry I didn’t buy you a birthday gift, but you didn’t deposit your paycheck, and you spent \$2,000 on clothes.”

Most of the expense was a purchase at a Robson Street leather boutique five days after she ran away; no doubt it was for the bomber jacket she was wearing. Buying luxuries on a joint credit card seemed to be part of a leave-your-husband plan; Eugénie never played such games.

“I accept the clothes I bought for myself as your gift to me. You can buy me a pair of matching shoes and some chocolates.”

“Happy birthday. Do you want World’s Finest chocolate almonds?”

“Ha-ha. Not World’s Finest.”

“Look, you can still smile. Please smile again for me.”

After dinner, we drove to Robson Street, but we had to park far from the shopping area. We walked in the icy air, holding gloved hands, as we wandered from shop to shop looking at luxuries we couldn’t afford. I didn’t stop to think that I would be able to afford them, too, after I put my career before my hobbies. Like Pearl’s life, my life would have to get worse before it got better. And thanks to her, that would soon happen.

1987: Metamorphosis

I bought Pearl a box of Belgian chocolates, and she took me to the boutique where she had bought the jacket. She chose a matching pair of shoes. I paid for them with our credit card and told Pearl to wait in the shop while I fetched the truck because it was far away, it was freezing, and we had a ferry to catch. When I drove back to the shop and paused on the street to pick her up, she was standing on the cold street, not inside the warm shop. She climbed in and slammed the door.

“Fuck—*Fuck*—*FUCK!*” She was livid. I couldn’t understand what I had done to ruin her birthday.

“I’m trying to be a gentleman. I wanted you to be warm in the shop.”

“You can’t fool me. You set this up to search my purse!”

“I don’t understand. You always have your purse with you.”

“I left my purse under the seat in the truck so I could walk with my hands in my pockets to keep them warm.”

“I didn’t know that. That’s a stupid place to leave a purse! Your car was broken into in a parking lot before. You’re not thinking straight.”

Pearl turned away from me. Everything I did now ended in conflict.

“Do you want to go to the Bowen Island New Year’s Eve party? There will be a band. Let’s try to be happy on New Year’s Eve.”

“I already bought tickets for Jodi and me.”

I was stunned. “You two bought tickets to the New Year’s Eve party without your husbands, and you didn’t tell me?”

“Gavin’s busy. And you won’t understand us when we sign fast.”

“Gavin is too busy on *New Year’s Eve* to join his pregnant girlfriend? I don’t believe it. Stockbrokers don’t work night-shift.* I want to be with you on New Year’s Eve. I’ll buy tickets and invite my sister Lydia and her husband so they can talk to me. They can stay overnight.”

“I don’t care what you do.”

“Can we dance?”

“We can decide that later.”

On New Year’s Eve, Pearl picked Jodi up from the ferry and drove to

* Jodi would go on to have three sons with three surnames, all different from her own.

1987: Metamorphosis

the school gymnasium for the party. In the jeep, I picked Lydia and Shawn up from the next ferry. The ferry was dusted white with snow, and it sparkled in the dock's floodlights.

By the time we arrived, there were no empty tables, so we sat down with Pearl and Jodi. They ignored us and signed in high-speed ASL at one end of the table while we spoke at the other end.

"This is how Pearl looked the night Dad rescued her from her mother's doorstep," shouted Lydia over the noise of the party.

"Be careful talking when you face that way. Jodi lipreads."

"Did you know Mom and Dad signed up for a sign language course?"

"That's wonderful! No one in Pearl's family studied sign language."

Lydia leaned her head on her hands to cover her mouth. "Mom told me she talked to a sign language classmate who has a deaf relative. That deaf relative said he hates hearing people who learn to sign if they don't have deaf relatives because he thinks there must be something wrong with them. He thinks they are misfits from the hearing world."

"Maybe I am. I know some people who think I handicapped myself by marrying a handicapped woman. Tonight, everyone will see us apart. I can't pretend all is well anymore. Too bad you don't know sign language—it's great for loud parties—but don't bother to learn it now."

"Does she still think you are trying to kill her?"

"And still failing? Talk to her tomorrow, woman-to-woman, to find out. I'm sure she won't talk to you tonight."

At midnight, to "Auld Lang Syne," I hugged Pearl and Jodi, but they pulled away and danced with each other. Lydia, Shawn, and I left first, Pearl and Jodi a few minutes later. We had to park at the bottom of the driveway and walk up with flashlights through the snow. Jodi slept on the sofa while Lydia and Shawn slept in the visitors' room.

New Year's Day was beautiful. While Pearl and Jodi were in the barn doing the chores, Lydia and Shawn walked out of the visitors' room.

"I slept well because it is so quiet here, but Shawn jammed a chair under the doorknob and stayed awake half the night."

Shawn's eyes were bloodshot. "I wish I hadn't opened *The Best of Life* in the visitors' room and looked at Capa's war photos before trying to go to sleep. I don't mind meeting the reaper, but I want to see her coming."

1987: Metamorphosis

Pearl and Jodi ignored us, so Lydia and Shawn left at mid-day without ever talking to them. Pearl invited Jodi to stay another night and asked me to sleep in the visitors' room so they could share the king-sized bed. At bedtime, while she and Pearl watched TV, I took Jodi's coat from the visitors' room and put it next to her on the sofa.

Pearl exploded. "Look how he controls me! You are my witness!"

I threw up my arms in despair. Jodi, like all of Pearl's friends, did nothing to help us as a couple. We had no network of common friends, so we had no friends to help both of us through tough times together but plenty to help each of us survive on our own.

The telephone rang the next morning. "Are you alone?" said Father.

"Jodi and Pearl are in the bedroom," I whispered. "They're not sleeping because Pearl's purse was in the kitchen when I went out to do the chores at seven, and it wasn't here when I returned."

"Lydia filled me in. Listen—Pearl could shoot you with your gun and say it was in self-defense. She'd have a good story after the allegations she's made, not that you'd care from a morgue. She could gun you down, plead self-defense, and never go to jail. Your mortgage insurance and life insurance would pay out, and she'd have it made. Get rid of your guns!"

"Jesus! I never thought of that. But if she notices the guns are gone, she might think I've disarmed her as the next step in my evil plan and preempt me by killing me first."

"That's possible. Then unload them, and hide your ammunition."

While Pearl was doing the chores, I unloaded the pistol. I put it and the locked ammunition box back exactly where they had been before.

1988: Paranoia

Jan:

Where Are the Bullets?

Snow fell upon snow. The weight of the snow pressed the boughs down like arches, turning the driveway into an Alpine tunnel of white. I put chains on the truck's tires and parked it at the bottom of the driveway, next to the road, before the driveway was blocked completely. For two weeks, we commuted, on separate shifts, by walking up and down the driveway with flashlights in our hands or teeth and groceries in our backpacks. We enjoyed doing the chores in the snow because it was a treat before doing them in the rain.

"I'm going to the store." Pearl dressed warmly and walked out into the night. I looked out a dark window and, through the trees, caught glimpses of her walking down the driveway, glancing over her shoulder.

An hour later, she returned with a carton of milk.

"I wanted to rent a movie, but no players were left. I saw Arlette in the store, and we talked."

"We don't need cow milk. We have goat milk. I think we also need to talk. Would you like a margarita?"

Pearl nodded. I mixed the drinks, and we sat down.

"Cheers. I think we have three choices. One: we continue to live like we are living now. We share our house but live separately."

Pearl shook her head.

"Two: we separate and divorce."

"Do you want a divorce?" she signed, without a trace of emotion.

"No. Three: You see a doctor. You can't live with suspicion about everyone because you will never be happy. And if you cannot trust your husband, you cannot have a family."

Pearl finished the rest of her drink in one shot. "I want children!"

"Then you must see a doctor. I can go with you if you want."

Pearl burst into tears. "I'll kill myself."

1988: Paranoia

“No!” I tried to hug her, but she sat rigidly, as if paralyzed.

“You know I have a counselor.”

“Good. Sometimes we should see her together. She could give you more help if she had more information. May I call her?”

“You may call her.” Pearl took a card from her purse and gave it to me. It was different from the card I had seen in her purse, and the address was far from where I had dropped her off to see her counselor.

At bedtime, I walked downstairs to stoke the stove and halted in my tracks—Pearl was kneeling in front of it and poking pages from her notepad through the grate into the fire. I retreated before she saw me.

In the morning, I called the counselor on the card Pearl gave me. She would only say Pearl was no longer her client. I was disappointed that Pearl had misled me. I thought Pearl had much to gain by my calling her new counselor at the Resource Centre for Abused Women whose name I had seen on the card in Pearl’s bag, so I called her. She was indignant I had dared to call her. She became rude when I told her Pearl’s mental health was deteriorating and she needed care. When I said she didn’t need to take my word for it but she did need to call Pearl’s mother and the RCMP for further information, she hung up on me.

If I told people that my wife had tried many times to kill me, they would think I was mentally ill, and if they cared for me they would refer me to a doctor. But when Pearl told people that her husband had tried many times to kill her, they assumed she was sane—and someone had referred her to a center for abused women! In the 1980s, there had been a backlash against abuse of women by men, so whenever a woman said she was being abused by a man, she was invariably believed. This was ideal for women who were being abused and who needed emotional support and separation from their abusers, but it worked against Pearl, who was not abused but mentally ill and needed psychiatric care: because I was male, I was silenced, and Pearl’s delusions were reinforced. I support equality but not prejudices like men are guilty unless they can prove themselves innocent, because proving non-events is impossible.

When Pearl came home from work, she was furious.

“My new counselor called me to warn me you called her. I’m shocked! I said you could call my *old* counselor, not my new one. That’s

1988: Paranoia

why I gave you the old counselor's card."

"*Warn* you I called? Why do you need to be 'warned?' That doesn't sound like counseling. That sounds like troublemaking."

"My new counselor is private!"

"That means she doesn't want to know all she can about you, so she can't help you. You need a counselor who talks to your whole family."

"How did you find out about my new counselor?"

"Your calls to her were on the telephone bill."

"But I didn't bring our telephone bill home."

"I had to pay the bills, so I asked the telephone company for copies."

I asked Pearl for the Horseshoe Bay bus schedule. When she took it from her purse and gave it to me, I saw *S. Sgt. Zaharia* written on it in unfamiliar handwriting. "Who is this?"

Pearl was startled and looked embarrassed. "He is Laurent's boss. Laurent refused to arrest you, so I complained to his boss." She signed this as casually as if she had made a service complaint in a supermarket.

I telephoned Staff Sergeant Zaharia from my office.

"I'm glad you called, because I was about to call you. Your wife keeps coming to our counter making allegations about you, Laurent, the RCMP, and the West Vancouver Police. She's been in here four times, each time more agitated. We're getting tired of it. Can you call her off?"

"What allegations? That I'm trying to kill her?"

"That was the first time. Now she says you're running drugs from Mexico by motorcycle, but we know you haven't crossed the border in three years. At first, we thought it was revenge against you and Laurent, but her conspiracy theories are more than revenge. Something is wrong with her; you can see it in her eyes. She needs help."

"I don't know how to help. She pushes back everything I try."

"When we suggested she see a psychiatrist, she became hysterical and had to be escorted out the door by two constables. It was quite a scene. Pearl shouldn't be getting behind the wheel of a car in her condition. I also wanted to call you about the pistol that we see is registered to your address. I recommend you have Laurent store it for your own safety."

I called Laurent. "I just spoke to Staff Sergeant Zaharia. He told me

what Pearl's been up to. Can you store my guns for me?"

"Sure. You'd be surprised how often I store guns for couples."

"I'll bring them to you tomorrow, after Pearl gets on the 5:30 ferry."

"I'll have coffee for you. Don't forget to wrap them; if you walk in here with a gun in your hand, I'm afraid I'll have to shoot you."

The same night, Pearl elbowed me in bed because she wanted to talk.

"Where are the bullets?"

I stared at her, thunderstruck.

"The gun has no bullets inside. Why did you remove the bullets?"

"I took them out for our safety. How did you find out?"

"I tried to shoot a tree, but nothing happened, only a click. Why did you cancel my protection?"

"We have too many arguments these days. We might fight."

Pearl nodded weirdly, in a way I hadn't seen before.

I was terrified. I waited until I heard her sleeping before I allowed myself to sleep. If her first target was a tree, what was her second target going to be? I called Laurent from work the next morning.

"Where the hell were you? I waited an hour for you, so I was late going on patrol."

"I'm sorry. While I was talking to you yesterday, Pearl tried to test-fire the gun at a tree, but I'd unloaded it. Because I disarmed her, she's probably more paranoid now. The tension at home is driving me nuts!"

"I used to admire you for all you do for Pearl, but I've got to tell you that I feel sorry for you now." I would never forget Laurent's words.

I called Arlette. "I'm calling to ask for your help for Pearl. She is having difficulty coping with reality. Can we talk?"

Arlette became as abusive as the counselor at the Resource Centre for Abused Women had been.

"What *right* do you have to call *anyone* about *Pearl*?" she hissed.

"She's my wife. Did she tell you about her RCMP visits? She needs to see a doctor, but I don't know how to get her to one. Can you help?"

"What *we* talk about is between *us*. Goodbye." She hung up on me.

I couldn't understand why every woman trying to help Pearl seemed to see her welfare as a *casus belli*.

1988: Paranoia

A few minutes later, the telephone rang.

“This is Franco, the drywaller. I heard you’re selling your house.”

I felt like I was being gaslighted. “We’re not selling our house!”

“That’s not what I heard, but if you change your mind, call me first.”

The atmosphere at home was explosive, with each of us trying to second-guess the other.

When the phone rang a few days later, I heard TTY tones and informed Pearl. She went to the visitors’ room and closed the door.

After Franco’s surprising call, I wanted to know if Pearl really *was* selling our house; she could have done so, because her name was the only name on the title. Because she intercepted my paper mail, I felt justified in intercepting her electronic call. I put a Dictaphone, provided by the Canadian government, next to the telephone and recorded the tones.

Pearl came out of the room and signed, “Please call my dentist to make an appointment for me. It is difficult through the MRC.”

Later, I played my recording back into our TTY, and I was able to read every word. Her call had nothing to do with dentistry; it was from a deafie in Los Angeles who was arranging for Pearl to visit in one month.

Pearl was planning for life on her own. She was about to destroy her second marriage—and mine—and there was nothing I could do.

At morning chore time, I left the footpath floodlights off to enjoy the moonlight bathing the snowy landscape. I stood at the top of the hill and looked down. The barn looked like a spaceship on a chalk planet, a life-support vessel between twinkling stars and shimmering snowflakes. I walked down the slope, turned on the lights, and squinted until my night vision left me. I fed the horses, goats, and sheep. I milked the goats. Mouse stood in his stall, but he ignored his feed. Something was wrong.

I called Gus. “Mouse won’t eat. He’s standing in front of his manger and shifting his weight back and forth, looking at his feed.”

“Damn serious. I’ll be right there.”

“I’ll leave the barn lights on. We’ll be at work when you arrive.”

When I returned home, Gus’s Subaru station wagon was parked next to our truck at the bottom of the driveway; it was too slippery to drive up. Pearl was cooking. The milking kit sat on the counter.

1988: Paranoia

“Something is wrong. Gus’s car is here, so I didn’t do the chores. I waited for you to come home.”

“Come with me.”

Pearl put on her farm clothes, and we walked to the barn. I was still in my suit. Gus and Donna were watching their daughter walk Mouse in a brown circle trodden into the snow. Cigarette butts lay everywhere. Country music from CJOR on the barn radio added to the surrealism.

“How is Mouse?” I signed and said.

“We brought a vet from the mainland. He says it’s colic. What did you feed him?”

“The same as always—alfalfa-timothy, Buckerfield’s horse mix, and MVP horse vitamins.”

“The vet put his arm up his ass,” said Donna. “He gave him an enema. He poured oil down his nose. He gave him drugs. It all made no difference. There is no cure for colic. Walking him is all we can do now.”

“He’s hurtin.’ He hasn’t eaten and he hasn’t shat,” said Gus. “Appaloosas are tough, though. Maybe he’ll pull through.”

“Poor Mouse!” cried their daughter, massaging his swollen belly.

At morning chore time, I found Donna walking Mouse. A thermos bottle stood atop a fence post. Donna’s voice choked. “He keeps lying down and kicking. Next time he goes down, I don’t know if he’ll get up.”

When I arrived home from work, tire tracks led up the driveway. I followed the tracks by flashlight. Gus’s Subaru, a four-wheel-drive, was parked in front of our house, with chains on all four tires.

Gus sat at the table, drunk. Pearl stood leaning against the kitchen counter, frustrated and furious, not knowing what to do with him.

“*Dead!*” Gus shouted, his voice slurred. “Mouse died in *your* barn.”

“I’m sorry.” I felt like an undertaker commiserating with a bereaved family member.

“Gone to the great Trout Lake in the sky. I need another drink.”

“Don’t give it to him,” Pearl signed. I didn’t interpret.

“I have two beers left.” I opened them and took one for myself. “To Mouse.”

“My horse is dead, lyin’ in your field. By morning he’ll be frozen solid. I wanna bury him in your field. I’ll make a deal with Eddie for his

backhoe.” Gus turned to Pearl and started gesturing, trying to sign, twisting his hands in front of his face, moving his lips without speaking. It was bizarre and offensive, especially to Pearl. “This is *so* natural ... you see how I talk to Pearl? Understand me? Of course, she does! Ask her if she understands me.”

“What an asshole,” signed Pearl.

“Teach me, dammit! I wanna talk. Help me talk to Pearl.”

“It’s time to go home. I can’t teach sign language.”

“Make me drive when I’m *drunk*?” Gus wiggled his fingers like worms, still trying to sign. “Fuck you, my friend. I can hold my liquor.”

Gus stood, wobbled to the door, and walked out. Pearl and I watched from a dark window as he staggered to his Subaru. Whisky barked and leaped at the end of his chain. Gus drove slowly down the driveway.

“Your friends are all weird.”

“He’s not my friend, he’s our customer. He got us started in business and has paid us thousands of dollars; we must thank him for that.”

When I did the chores, I saw a gray mound dusted with snow in the far corner of the field. Mouse rests under Trout Lake Farm today.

“I decided to move out. I work on Saturday, so I will leave on Sunday.”

I knew it was futile, but I signed, “Don’t go. Stay with Whisky and me.” I hugged her, but she stood stiffly and didn’t hug me.

“You must plan. Your life will be hard. You must care for the animals and keep the fire burning every day and buy your food. I am sorry I am leaving in winter because I don’t want you to suffer. Please stay away from me when I move. Arlette will come at four o’clock to help me.”

I couldn’t help but wonder if Arlette would have helped destroy our marriage if we had bought her futon, and we had all become friends.

“I will stay here while you are moving out because we must agree on what you take. Will you come back someday?”

“I need to think. You need to think, too. Everything changed after I discovered who you are. It is hard for me to explain my feelings to you.”

“Let’s see Dr. Foreman together. He helps couples. He signs, too.”

“You go. It will be good for you. There is nothing wrong with me.”

“Will you stay at Arlette’s house after you leave?”

1988: Paranoia

“That is my secret.” Pearl crossed her arms.

While Pearl was doing chores, I read an advertisement in the *Undercurrent* for a performance by the Purcell String Quartet in the home of Hans, the island’s impresario. I called him to reserve a ticket.

When Pearl returned, she signed, “Who did you call? I know you called someone on the kitchen phone just now because the wire moved.”

I showed her the advertisement. “I reserved one seat. You wouldn’t want to watch two violins, a viola, and a cello. When you move out, please don’t take the truck. I need it to carry animal feed and firewood.”

“I am taking the truck. I need to be independent.”

“Is that why you wanted me to buy a jeep? Were you planning to leave four months ago?”

Pearl didn’t answer. She walked into the visitors’ room and closed the door. I heard keyboard keys tapping, so I put the Dictaphone next to the kitchen telephone and tape-recorded the TTY tones. Later, I played the recording into the TTY and learned that Pearl would move in with Arlette but would store her furniture with Arlette’s friend, Bruce.

On Saturday morning, the alarm clock rang at 5:25 a.m. I tapped Pearl on the shoulder to wake her up for work, and I changed the alarm clock time to wake up for the morning chores, as usual.

Pearl turned and tapped me on the shoulder. “Why do you look sleepy? What were you doing while I was asleep?”

Even though it was our last full day together, I worked on the house as I had done every Saturday for three years. In winter, Saturdays were especially important because the Building Centre closed on Sundays.

When Pearl came home from work, she drove to the store and brought back a week’s supply of food for me, a copy of *Reader’s Digest* for herself, and a dozen empty cardboard cartons. She made dinner, and we ate in silence. While she packed her life into cardboard cartons, I followed her, both to spend a few more minutes together and to see what she took. She rolled back the futon and browsed through the boxes stored under it. Pearl packed with urgency, like a horse cantering home.

I remembered vividly how I felt when Eugénie left, how I carried her boxes, installed her lights, and set up her furniture for her as if it were

1988: Paranoia

still our furniture and we were setting up housekeeping all over again.

After Pearl packed her articles, including her conch, she inspected mine. Pearl took my calculator, ham radio equipment, and hunting knife and set them aside, as if she had been briefed on how best to divorce.

“You bought these during our marriage.”

“I bought all those while I was a student.”

Pearl shrugged and continued packing. I found a romantic note she had written to me, one she had failed to destroy while she had been at home alone during the past few months. She snatched it from my hands.

“All writing is mine!”

“The notes I wrote to you are yours. The notes you wrote to me are mine.”

I grabbed her hand, took the note, and put it in my pocket. Pearl shattered the silence with a scream.

“I’ll call the police!”

“Shall I call the police for you?”

“I will push the button on the emergency dialer.”

“If you push that button, the ambulance and firemen will come, too.”

“Then I will call Laurent myself.” Pearl sat down at the TTY in the visitors’ room but didn’t bother to close the door. I watched her type:

```
MESSAGE RELAY CENTRE GA  
THIS IS PEARL KING PLEASE CALL 5555212 AND GIVE MY  
MESSAGE TO REMP LAURENT GA  
WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE GA  
COME NOW DERRICK HURT ME GA  
PLEASE WAIT MESSAGE RECEIVED BY PAGER 5555212 GA  
THANKS SK
```

“Laurent gave me his secret pager number for any emergency.” With a conceited smirk, Pearl resumed packing, calm again.

I put *The Joy of Signing* in her packing box. Pearl pulled it out handed it back to me. “Maybe you will need it someday.”

I shook my head. “I will never sign again.”

A tear ran down her cheek, hesitated, and dripped on the bed.

Pearl walked to the family room and stared at the pictures still

leaning against the bare wall. “Some pictures are missing.”

I lifted a picture, exposing a clean line of brown plywood surrounded by telltale white. “That’s impossible. You can see three years of dust.”

“Where you took one away, you put new dust to cover the line.”

I laughed. Pearl browsed through the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry room and took her fair share. She went downstairs to the workbench inside the unfinished half of the house; I followed her, a beer in my hand. She turned on the fluorescent lamp and shivered. She searched my tools and the rows of Ragu jars filled with nails and screws. She packed the antique telephone her grandfather had given us. I looked at the brass casings sparkling in the gravel, souvenirs of our shooting party two years before. Pearl inspected the motorcycle, its tires long flat.

“You bought new motorcycle tires.”

“I bought those in Tucson. They’re worn out. Do you want them?”

“No. You can borrow my barbeque to cook when the power is off. I don’t need it now. Where is Laurent? I called him a long time ago.”

“He knows I won’t hurt you, so he’s waiting for us to stop arguing.”

Our last night was like any other. Pearl slept beside me, giving me false hope that, after spending time in her deaf world and thinking things over, she might want to return and make things work.

Helping Pearl Out

On Sunday, 17 January, Pearl left for good. I woke up at 6:45 and did the chores. When I returned, she was stacking her cartons near the door. She packed the clock radio she had won from the Building Centre and started dividing the pens, paper clips, and erasers. She stared at the little piles on the visitors’ room desk and signed, “Where is my roach clip?”

“I didn’t know you had a roach clip.* What does it look like?”

“I demand to know where you put it!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. You never smoked here.”

* For smoking the butt ends of marijuana joints without burning one’s fingertips.

“You lie!” Her hands were shaking with anger. She started to babble incoherently “You hid my roach clip ... I see ... *now* I understand ... your goal ... *aha!* ... later, we’ll see.” Pearl took three computer diskettes from the drawer and sneered at me. “I will take these to be sure you cooperate with me. I don’t want you to make any trouble.”

I shrugged. “Keep them. I have copies. You are blackmailing me—I don’t like it.” While she put the diskettes in her carton, Laurent’s jeep came up the driveway; it had been 12 hours since she called. While she was greeting him, I removed only the financial diskette from her carton.

Laurent wore his civilian clothes. “Pearl paged me last night.”

“Derrick twisted my arm last night.” She showed her arm to Laurent.

“Your arm looks fine. I see you’re moving. Where are you going?”

“To Arlette’s,” she signed, then took some paper and scribbled a note.

Behind her back, I said, “She’s going to Arlette’s, but her stuff is going to Bruce’s. Is he all right? I don’t want her to have trouble.”

Pearl turned around before Laurent could answer, and handed her note to him so I couldn’t see it. Laurent read it.

“Derrick knows. He said Bruce’s name just now.”

My foreknowledge made Pearl explode. “Virgil is a cocaine dealer!”

Laurent humored Pearl. “Is Virgil a cocaine dealer, Derrick?”

“He used to be a cocaine dealer, but he retired a long time ago.”

“Derrick searched his house with an electronic detector. The real reason we rode to Mexico was to bring cocaine to Virgil during his ride back. I flew back from Mexico, but Derrick rode home alone.”

“If he hurts you, call me.” Laurent ended the discussion. As he walked out, he said over his shoulder to me, “I don’t respect betrayal!”

Pearl had been losing her credibility because of her distorted view of reality, but, until now, she had kept her integrity and Laurent’s respect for her. Now she lost both by snitching—irrespective of whether her statements might be true. Police and criminals look down on turncoats even when they find their information useful.

Whisky barked, and Arlette walked in. I put on my coat and sat by the door like a customs inspector while Pearl and Arlette walked back and forth carrying carton after carton to our Nissan and to Arlette’s Toyota. It was just above freezing. I didn’t lift a finger to help, because I

didn't want to feel responsible for what might happen next.

"I hope Pearl will thank you for helping her out of her marriage and her future," I said without signing. "I'll help if she returns."

Arlette said nothing. All of us had grim looks on our faces. The women piled the sofa sections on top of the cartons, tied down the loads, and left without a thought for Whisky and me. The way people treat their pets says much about them; Pearl abandoned Whisky as carelessly as she abandoned me, as if she had never loved either of us.

The house was silent except for the refrigerator's drone. I put a cassette of Bach's *Double Violin Concerto* in the player—for the first time in years, I could enjoy music without a trace of guilt. I sat down at the kitchen table and telephoned my father.

"Pearl's gone," I stammered.

"I can't tell you how much it hurts us to hear those words. Do you want your mother and me to come and spend the night with you?"

"Yes, that would be wonderful," I said, with a lump in my throat.

"Is there anything we need to bring? Did she take the TV?"

"Of course, she took the TV, but I don't want a TV."

"Sit down. Don't do anything. We'll get the next ferry."

I called Hans to say I couldn't attend his concert, and I told him why. No doubt the Bowen Island grapevine would quickly spread the news of the separation of one of its more visible couples. He suggested I read the Psalms, starting with Number 23, *The Lord Is My Shepherd*.

While I stoked the stove and did the chores, I wondered what Pearl was doing. Then, I reloaded the gun in case a posse of deaf vigilantes like those in Pearl's stories paid me a visit. One after the other, my siblings called to offer their support. My parents arrived a few hours later with groceries and their portable TV set. It occurred to me that my parents had visited us many times, but Pearl's parents had visited us only once.

"It must hurt you," my mother said, hugging me. "Your eyes are red."

"I can't believe she's done it! Pearl's flushing her future down the toilet! I know I shouldn't feel guilty, but I can't help it. And the property, the mortgages, the woodstove, and the livestock all depend on me now. I can't get sick even for one day."

"Do you think Pearl was frightened by you killing your own meat?"

1988: Paranoia

said my mother, while tidying up the kitchen.

“No. She’s a country girl. And it’s good to be able to do everything.”

“I know; you always wanted to do everything. When you were eight, you took the record player apart. Your father was furious, but you said, ‘But if I don’t take it apart, how can I know how to put it together?’”

“That curiosity drove you to Pearl,” said Father. “I warned you that the worst part of a handicap can be mental. It’s not easy to grow up with a disability without looking askance at the world. You are better off without her unless she gets treatment—which she won’t. Even if she gets treatment, you are better off without her. Her mother said her first marriage ended the same way, so she’s been seeing things her own special way for a long time. *Don’t* try to get her back. *Don’t* give her anything.”

“Last year was like *A Long Day’s Journey into Night*. Eugénie and I saw dozens of plays. Pearl and I only saw one: *Children of a Lesser God*.”

My mother looked out the window. “It might’ve helped if you’d installed curtains.”

In the morning, at chore time, I felt a sense of *déjà vu*. My Casio alarm clock was the one I had bought the day Eugénie left me. I filled the stove, and lit the tinder with one flame from the lighter. I looked through the grate at the flicker of light on the corner of a newspaper, gliding across the paper, devouring the kindling, snapping through the sticks, and then roaring over the rounds of hemlock and alder so heavy that they took a strong back to lift. The flue thermometer rose as the stovepipe moaned. I remembered the first time Pearl and I had built a fire in that stove, assisted by a cup of paint thinner.

I walked through the fresh, frosty air to the barn to do the chores and enjoy the friendship of the animals that Pearl would never see again. When I returned, mother had made breakfast and MJB coffee.

I called my boss to ask for a day off; he gave me a week. “I thought Pearl might be leaving, because, at the Christmas party, she asked if she could come visit us alone. I thought we might help if she’d tell us what’s bothering her, but she never visited. I’ll let you know if she ever does.”

I called Clifford. He advised me to cancel our credit card, take half the money out of our joint account, open a new account in my name,

1988: Paranoia

deposit my paychecks to my new account, change my life insurance beneficiary, change the locks, and get receipts for everything I give her.

I canceled the appointments I'd made with Dr. Foreman; we'd missed the first one by just two weeks. I opened a post office box on Bowen Island and redirected my mail. I opened a new bank account. I wrote to Virgil, who had no telephone, and asked him to call my parents' telephone on a specified date and time. It was a busy first day alone.

I passed my bereavement week vacuuming, washing, organizing, repairing, sweeping, taking sympathetic telephone calls, throwing sticks for Whisky, and listening to the Moody Blues. I did the evening chores with a beer stuffed in each coat pocket; it stayed cold in the frigid air. I sat with the animals and wondered how long I could continue to be with them. I listened to the cat scratching in the loft. A barn is never silent, always restless, even at night. I stroked my four-legged friends and walked back to an empty house.

The telephone rang. "This is Arlette's husband. I'm trying to set up Pearl's caption decoder. Which connector is the input, and which one is the output?"

I was surprised that Pearl was making herself at home so quickly. I told him I couldn't help without looking at the back of the decoder, and I offered to come, but he told me to stay away.

My sister Nadine visited, and I took her on a gravel roads tour in the jeep. When we stopped at the General Store, Arlette walked out and stared at her as if we were dating. I wondered what she would tell Pearl.

I drove to my parents' house to take Virgil's call. "I'm at a payphone," he said, which meant the call would be short. I updated him on the recent events. "Well, well, well, another one bites the dust. You *do* have trouble with women, but remember this: *fuck 'em if they can't take a joke!*"

Virgil laughed hysterically. His laughter was one of the reasons we had remained friends for half a lifetime, and it drained the strain of the past few months from me. My parents stared at me as I laughed, too.

"You need to know Pearl told the RCMP you are a dealer. That's why I thought you'd better not call me at home. My address book, with your name in it, has disappeared. Pearl must have stolen it."

1988: Paranoia

“You know I got nothin’ to hide. When are you coming to Snowslide? We could do drugs, have a party, even have a wake.” Virgil burst into contagious laughter. “Life’s too short to be paranoid. I used to be paranoid, too, but I got over it when my cocaine was all used up!”

I soon received a call at work. “This is Sheehan, solicitor for Pearl,” said a raspy smoker’s voice. “What is the name of your solicitor?”

“I can’t afford a solicitor.” Eugénie and I hadn’t needed a lawyer when we divorced—we just followed a book from Self-Counsel Press—and I didn’t see why I needed one now.

“Mr. King, I advise you to retain counsel. It is against professional ethics for me to talk to another lawyer’s client. I need to know his name so that I can set up an exploratory meeting to try to resolve any issues we may face in drawing up a separation agreement. An interpreter will be provided by the Western Institute for the Deaf.”

“Pearl wants this done after just two weeks? I will represent myself.”

“My client wants a separation agreement as soon as possible because there is a certain ... lack of trust.”

“Is that because I’m trying to kill her or because I deal in drugs?”

“I didn’t hear that! You will hear from my secretary shortly.”

A winter storm battered the island. Rain machine-gunned the windows and skylights. A wall of wind pushed the warmth out of the house, rubbed the trees together so they moaned like cellos, and flipped the doghouse on its side. Sleep was impossible. The next morning after chores, I changed into my suit, overcoat, galoshes, and gloves and, looking like a stray M*A*S*H cast member, rattled down the hill in the jeep just before dawn. The steering wheel jerked back and forth as the tires rolled over debris. A fallen tree blocked the driveway. I abandoned the jeep and hitchhiked to the ferry.

That afternoon, sleep-deprived, I walked from work to Sheehan’s. Pearl, Sheehan, and an interpreter were waiting for me.

“This is the first time I’ve had a certified interpreter to talk to my wife,” I signed and said.

Pearl’s eyes alternated between my hands and the interpreter’s. “Only talk! Your signs at the same time are confusing me.”

1988: Paranoia

After all those years, it had become as natural as breathing to sign to Pearl, so I had to sit on my hands to stop myself from doing it.

“Pearl wishes to be separated,” said Sheehan. “As you are both working, have no children, and have been married only two years, there is no issue of alimony. Precedence holds that you take back your premarital assets and divide any property acquired during the marriage.”

“I don’t want to be separated. I want Pearl to come home.”

Pearl was still for a moment. “No.”

“I love you. There is no need for you to run away.” The interpreter signed so quickly that it was hard for me to see my words in her signs.

“I can’t come back.”

I pulled my hands out from under my legs and held them out to Pearl. She turned away from me.

“You know why I can’t return.”

“I don’t know why. It doesn’t make sense at all.”

“Mr. King!” Sheehan snapped, “The purpose of this meeting is to agree on a separation agreement. What you two do *with* it is not my concern.”

I sat on my hands again. “You are tearing us apart.”

“Pearl proposes that you keep the jeep, and she keeps the truck. The difference in value will be taken into account.”

“I need the truck. I have to carry feed and firewood—tons of it.”

“If you will accept the jeep, then we are left with the matter of the house. My client is willing to transfer the title provided she receives half its equity. The question is: how much is an uncompleted house worth?”

“That’s easy. I updated our appraisal last month, for insurance. It came to \$118,000. Pearl knows that.”

“My client has arranged her own appraisal. According to her appraisal, your house has a value of \$112,000.”

“I accept Pearl’s lower valuation. It is more recent.” I was astounded by how difficult Pearl, or perhaps her advisors, was making her own life.

Pearl started to cry. “You know all about business, so I have to protect myself.”

“Let’s take the average. Finally, my client advises me that she would like to split her legal fees and costs with you. She wants to make the

1988: Paranoia

arrangements in a businesslike way and to remain friends.”

I didn't know what to say. I threw my hands in the air and laughed.

Pearl had been avoiding the ferries I usually took, so one day I left work early to catch the afternoon ferry that she usually took. As usual, she was sitting in the passenger lounge. I sat down beside her in my suit and overcoat. Passengers glanced at us.

“Hello,” I signed with a smile.

“Hello,” she signed limply, without a smile.

“You are still beautiful, but you look exhausted.”

“I know. You look tired too.”

“There are things we should discuss. Would you come to the pub?”

Pearl shrugged, looked away, and signed, “OK.”

It was raining and just above freezing when the ferry docked. Pearl followed me to the Bowen Island Pub, keeping her distance from me.

“What do you want to discuss?”

I took a bank draft from my jacket pocket. “I cashed our time deposit. This is all of it, as you saw when we went to the bank—\$3,000. Take it. You need it. But please initial the receipt.”

Pearl reached for the draft and then pulled back. “Quinn told me not to sign anything.”

“Quinn? The fingerspelling lawyer who made our wills?”

“I changed lawyers. I don't like Sheehan now.”

“Take the check. You need it because I must cancel our credit card.”

I took my credit card from my wallet, broke it in half, and put the pieces on the table next to the bank draft.

Pearl stared at me, eyes like plates. “You can't do that!”

“Take the check. I love you, and you need it. I am trying to help you as much as I can, but I have to protect myself at the same time.”

“That's awful! You are *mean!*” Pearl burst into tears.

I pushed the draft across the table. “Then take it without initialing. Fuck the lawyers. You need the money. I only care about you.”

She pushed the draft back again and stared at me with piercing eyes. “You told Laurent that I smoke marijuana and I need to see a doctor!”

“We never talked about marijuana, but I told him you need a doctor.”

1988: Paranoia

keep his hands off her, but we promised not to tell you where she lives.”

“Then don’t tell me. Hint.”

Alan looked out the ferry window. “Such blue water today.”

I smiled. “Bluewater. Thanks.”

Leo came to visit while Maria was in Mexico. I picked him up from the ferry on a cold, clear day and walked him around the property and lake. I took him on a jeep tour of the fire roads up to the Mount Gardiner summit with its view of Point Grey. When we stopped at the microwave station, Leo pulled a joint from his pocket and lit it. An eagle circled over us so closely that we could hear its feathers slicing through the air.

“Leo, after you married Maria, Pearl and I only saw you twice. We never even saw your wedding photos, all of which I took for you.”

“I’m sorry to tell you, but right after we married, Maria decided which friends I may keep, and she threw out the photos she didn’t like.”

I was disappointed to hear this, after 25 years of friendship.

“It’s all right. Avoiding another divorce is our first priority. Two primary-school chums have become the drinking buddies that a respectable man wouldn’t want his wife to know. She’s right: we mustn’t see each other. And we should keep our wives from each other, too. A memory of a young man’s adventure might be an old woman’s outrage.”

I folded the windshield forward and started the jeep. We drove down the gravel roads and back to the house, enjoying the wind and the sun in our faces, still stoned. We did the chores together, got drunk, and listened to music from the old times. But we never saw each other again.

In the morning, I drove Leo to the ferry. Pearl walked off the gangway as he walked on, but she ignored him. As she passed my jeep, she signed, “For years, I never saw Leo—now he comes to Bowen! Why?” Pearl marched past me without pausing for an answer.

Each month, a truckload of grain passed through the animals, and a truckload of firewood passed through the stove. By March, both had run low. Pearl had taken the truck, so my father bought me a cheap GMC pickup with a failing transmission, almost ready for the junkyard. Its faded green paint camouflaged it in the trees. With Whisky in the back, I only needed some Red Man tobacco to look like a redneck.

1988: Paranoia

On the way to the barn for chores, the cat blocked my path, sat in the middle of the trail staring at me, and meowed. Each time I approached her, she moved farther up the trail, looked back, and meowed. She led me into the forest to a rotten log where four kittens were nestled inside, squeaking like mice. The cat curled up around them and purred like a motor, proud to show them to me. I picked up each kitten one by one, savoring the magic of a Bowen Island morning.

I found Pearl's first divorce documents in the kitchen; she had overlooked a drawer when she packed. I became curious about what Pearl's mother had meant when she told mine, "Her first marriage ended the same way." I still had our second TTY, so I could use it to talk to her first husband if I could reach him. I called his divorce lawyer, outlined our situation, and asked him for his former client's telephone number. In a few hours he called me back and told me he had just called his former client to seek his permission to release it, but his mother, who was hearing, had taken his call and said, tellingly, "It is in the best interest of all parties if my son has no contact with Pearl whatsoever."

I heard a truck coming up the driveway. Whisky didn't bark, so it had to be Pearl. I opened the front door and watched her climb out of the truck, ignore Whisky, walk halfway to me, stand outside in the rain, and sign, "I need my old telephone from the visitors' room. The square telephone where I live doesn't fit my TTY."

"That old telephone was in my condo before you met me, but you can have it if you want it. I'll go and get it. Come in! I love you."

"It's not your telephone! You lie!" Pearl burst into tears and ran to the truck. "You are awful!" The tires sprayed gravel at the bedroom windows as she drove away with the engine roaring.

I ran through the house, looked out the window on the other side, and watched her turn west, toward Bluewater.

At twilight, I put my old telephone on the blanket covering the holes in the bench seat of the GMC and backed it slowly from its hiding place in the trees. I drove to the Bluewater neighborhood and cruised up and down the lanes in the gray mist in a truck that I knew Pearl wouldn't recognize. Before long, I caught a glimpse of blue at the crest of a

1988: Paranoia

driveway. Pearl had forced most of the truck behind some trees but had not been able to park it out of sight.

Pearl was looking out from the basement through a sliding glass door as I approached. With a smile, I offered her my telephone.

“How did you find me?” She looked terrified I had found her—as if she had expected to be able to hide from anyone on a small island.

“I saw you turn right, so I turned right, and I looked for you.”

Pearl slid the door open and took the telephone, cringing, the way an abused dog recoils when touched by a stranger. When I reached out to hug her, she froze. She let me hold her, but she was lifeless and limp.

I stepped back. “Come home. I love you. Whisky misses you, too.”

“You know why I can’t do that.” Pearl started trembling.

“I don’t know why. You are safer at home than you are here.”

“Go!” Pearl stepped back and locked the door.

Mar: **Your Little Black Book**

Scapegoat kidded, and the sheep lambled. Alan and I disinfected, docked, disbudded, and castrated. A few days later, I arrived at the barn at chore time to see Mothergoat standing in her pen with a leg sticking out of her vulva. I called Alan. He rushed over to help try to save Mothergoat’s life.

“Crikey!” exclaimed Alan, looking at the goat. “She’s exhausted.”

We used Scapegoat’s kid as a model to help understand what we were looking at. Alan oriented the bleating kid behind Mothergoat until it matched the protruding leg. “I think we are looking at a foreleg.”

He wrapped a rope around Mothergoat’s neck, forelegs, and ribs to improvise a harness. I took off my coat, rolled up my sleeve, poured cooking oil on my arm, and slid my arm into her womb past the protruding leg. I pushed my arm in past my elbow, groping, trying to visualize in three dimensions what I was feeling. Mothergoat bawled and squirmed. Alan struggled to hold her still. She must have been in pain.

“The pressure in here is *unbelievable!* If I stop pushing, my arm will pop out like a cork. It’s so warm and cozy inside; I see why babies don’t want to be born. I can’t figure out where the head is!”

1988: Paranoia

“Hurry before she dies and we lose our jobs. This will be difficult to explain. My colleagues are beginning to think I’m eccentric,” said Alan.

“Everyone I know *is* crazy. Shit, I just poked out an eye!”

“A landmark! Good show! Carry on!”

“The mouth must be here somewhere. Ow! Teeth—I cut my finger! The tongue! ... I’m pulling the mouth. Look!—her sides are widening. He’s turning around. Now, easy”

My arm slipped out, then my wrist, then the head of the dead kid. Mothergoat delivered the rest of the kid onto the floor and then the afterbirth. I cut the umbilical cord and carried the corpse into the forest.

I felt like having company from outside the Bowen Island milieu, so I called Mensa Vancouver’s social secretary, Oona, and invited her to visit me. I had talked to her at the monthly drinks night ever since I joined the club, and I had told the members about my life with a deaf wife on Bowen Island. I picked her up at the ferry, treated her to lunch at the Snuggler, and took her on a four-wheel-drive backroads tour in the jeep. I showed her the house, and we walked the trail to Trout Lake. We skipped stones across the lake and watched the trout breaching.

When we walked back up to the house, a car was parked in the driveway. I hadn’t locked the house; I never did during the day. Pearl was standing in the kitchen with a real estate agent, who was taking pictures of the house. Pearl glared at Oona; she had no idea who she was.

“This house is not for sale,” I said without signing.

“Pearl asked me to look around,” the agent said.

“What?” signed Pearl.

“Nothing,” I signed.

Oona covered her face with her hands, embarrassed to be with me. Pearl stormed out with the agent. I drove Oona to the next ferry.

I flew to Montreal, Toronto, and Amsterdam for a three-week business trip. I left the farm under Alan’s care and left the dog with my boss. Whisky jumped for joy when I picked him up after I returned.

“Whisky was a good experience for the kids,” my boss said. “Now we’ve decided not to get a puppy.”

“I’ve accepted a transfer to Holland, a two-year contract. I’ll clear my

1988: Paranoia

head for a while. Meanwhile, my parents will rent my house from me.”

My boss smiled. “I knew. I heard you impressed some people there.”

“If the timing works for you, I’ll start in November. That will give me time to complete the west wing, but I’ll need another loan.”

“I’ll authorize it. It will be good for you to leave. Pearl is mad, and she’s mad *at* you. She was here for dinner last week. You should have seen the look on her face when Whisky greeted her as I opened the front door! She called his name, the first time I’d heard her speak.”

“She came after all. Good! Were you able to help her?”

“No. And because Whisky was here, I couldn’t avoid telling her you were away. She asked when you would return. I said you’d be back in 24 hours, to avoid her taking advantage of your absence. The kids thought it was fun to talk on paper. She revealed nothing of how she feels about you, how she feels about herself, or what her plans are. Before she left, she came to what was surely the purpose of her visit: she asked me how much money you could borrow! I said you already borrowed the maximum when you bought the house. I advise you to keep your expatriation a secret, lest Pearl tries to use that knowledge against you.”

I began the countdown to my departure. I worked at my job, completed my MBA, and did what I could to finish the house on my own. At night, I enjoyed time with my affectionate friends in the barn.

Alone, painting the ceiling, I fell and broke my left arm. I slipped a board under my Colles’ fracture, called the ambulance, and was ferried to hospital. When I woke up, I had a cast from my hand to my shoulder. I had horses, sheep, goats, a dog, and a cat to care for, a house to finish, a woodstove to feed, and a job to do—with one arm. I took a taxi home and did the chores.

I was back at work the next day, wearing short-sleeve shirts and no tie. My colleagues joked that I wasn’t dedicated because I hadn’t cut the left arm off my suits. Groggy from opioid painkillers, I continued finishing the house with my right arm, carrying tools in my belt pouch and holding nails in my teeth.

A few evenings later, I saw Pearl on the ferry. I sat down opposite her, my arm in a cast in a sling.

1988: Paranoia

“How are you?” I signed with one arm.

“OK,” she signed curtly, with a nonchalant shrug.

“Let’s have hot chocolate together.”

“Only if you promise not to argue.”

When the ferry docked, she remained seated until I left the lounge. She followed me, at a distance, down the stairs, off the gangway, and up the hill to the Bowen Island Pub. She sat as stone-faced as an Easter Island moai.

“You sign first.”

“I broke my arm. It hurts. I have to steer the jeep with my legs while I shift gears. It’s hard to climb the hayloft ladder with one arm.”

Pearl felt no compassion for the plight of a one-armed man on a farm. “Everyone is looking at me.”

This time, it was true—when I turned to look, the eyes in the pub darted away from us. People didn’t know what to make of us now.

“Then why did you walk so far behind me?”

“I want to make my independence clear. You want a weak woman, but I am strong.” Pearl crossed and uncrossed her arms. “I noticed you changed the locks on the house. I am handicapped, but you won’t give me anything. Why don’t you sign the separation agreement?”

“After you refused to take the \$3,000 draft, I gave it to your lawyer, Quinn. I told him you needed money, and I told him it was all the money we had. Now he claims I told him it was only *half* the money. Bullshit. We are arguing about that now.”

Pearl sniffed back a tear. “I don’t trust hearies anymore.”

I paid the bill. We walked out, followed by curious eyes. As we stepped out into the cold, I asked Pearl if I could kiss her goodnight, but she ignored me. She took the flashlight out of her pocket, walked briskly to the truck, and drove away.

Laurent sat down next to me on the ferry. “I’m being transferred to Toronto,” he said with a melancholy sigh. “I want to tell you I’m sorry about Pearl.”

His sympathy meant a lot to me. “Thanks. My dream woman turned into a Kafkaesque nightmare.”

1988: Paranoia

“Now Pearl is accusing me of stealing her little black address book.”

“That’s *my* address book. It had all my friends’ information. She must have taken it. I don’t have a copy, so I’ll lose some of my friends.”

“She used to wave it around while she was ranting in the detachment, thinking it supported her accusations. Then, she couldn’t find it anymore. She thinks I swiped it. Imagine that!”

“Thanks, Laurent. I saw her walk off the ferry and get into Luisa’s car. She’s the agent who sold us the house. Her car was packed with kids and dogs. I went for a drive and saw her truck parked in front of Luisa’s. That’s her third home in five months! Her wandering is heartbreaking.”

“She will never be happy unless she returns and you’re open to that. Otherwise, either she recovers her mental health, realizes what she lost when she left you, and becomes depressed, or she doesn’t recover, remains delusional, and thinks she is lucky to have survived you. There is no other way. It’s depression in recovery or contentment in dementia.”

“Imagine how it must feel on the inside, thinking everybody is against you, even those who love you. Terrified? Betrayed? Revengeful? And to have the urges—and the *counselors*—that tell her that the best solution is to run away from those who love her, even though they are the people who most care for her.”

I wrote a letter to Quinn proposing what I thought was a fair split. He ignored me, so I paid Clifford to contact him. Clifford reported Pearl was now convinced I was hiding money, so she wanted, beside her previous demands, \$20,000 plus half the meat in our freezer. Her demand for money was outrageous because she knew that if we had that money, we would have finished the house.

Clifford urged me to settle because there was no telling what she would do next. He joked that I would be lucky to keep the house because there was a “housekeeping” principle in divorce law whereby the wife kept the house. He promised to include a non-molestation clause in our agreement wherein we each promised not to disturb the other, the other’s friends, family, and colleagues—and the RCMP.

1988: Paranoia

“It’s at Luisa’s. But Pearl didn’t sign the receipt.”

“Was Pearl home when you delivered the goods?”

“Maybe. Her pickup was there. We heard a dog barking inside, but didn’t see anyone. We put her stuff in the back of her truck and put a tarp over it to keep it dry. No charge for the tarp.”

“Do you mean Pearl found her stuff sitting in the rain in the back of her truck under a tarp? She’ll think I dumped it there to say, ‘Fuck you.’”

“Sorry, but we didn’t want to talk to her. We’ve been hearing strange stories.”

I borrowed as much as I could to finish the house for rental. I hired the best contractor I could find to do the framing, walls, ceilings, and fireplace in the unfinished wing and pour a concrete floor in the basement. I did the wiring and plumbing, installed electric heating on both sides of the house, and installed a Jacuzzi. The work to complete the house took four months, but everything was on time, on budget, and done well. I was getting the job done, but without Pearl, my heart was no longer in it. We had learned from our mistakes, but Pearl would never benefit from our expensive education.

As I leaned over the railing of the ferry, Luisa brushed past me and said, “Go up to the smoking lounge. Wait for me there.” She walked away without pausing, like a secret agent. I walked up to the second floor and entered the smoking lounge for the first and last time.

Luisa lit a cigarette. “Pearl was living with me. I wanted to help her, and she could babysit my kids. But Pearl’s out of her goddamn mind!” She took another drag on her lipstick-stained cigarette. “Pearl’s nuts!” she said. The others in the lounge pretended not to listen. “Holy *Jesus*, she’s nuts! Pearl threatened my kid’s eye with a pencil! I shouted at her to get the fuck out of my house! I don’t want her crazy shit near my kids. I told her to take all her crap and go. I don’t know where she went.”

It hurt me to picture the scene and hear Pearl was so lost, always running down the road, always away from danger, never to sanctuary.

Aug: Psychological Abuse!

Gus asked me to join his Bowen Island Pentathlon team in a relay race for riding, running, swimming, canoeing, and cycling. He was the rider; I was the runner. I called Eugénie and invited her to Bowen Island to see the race. Our team came in last. Eugénie enjoyed the event and my jeep tour and was impressed by the property and the nearly-completed house. The woman I once loved was delighted to spend a day with me, yet the woman I still loved had been hiding from me for months.

The Bowen Island Country Fair, held shortly after the Pentathlon, marked the end of summer, and it was my father's sixty-fifth birthday. My parents, brother, sister-in-law, and their baby came to Bowen to join me for the occasion. At the fair, children had their faces painted while adults browsed stalls and played tug-of-war. My family sat at a picnic table in the sunshine, eating lunch.

My mother shouted, "Oh, my God! Derrick—look behind you!"

I turned and saw Pearl walking in the distance, alone. When she saw me, she stopped and stared at me with a faraway look on her face.

"I haven't seen Pearl since she moved off the island a few months ago."

My mother waved to Pearl. "I *must* talk to her."

Pearl walked toward us, but she stopped several meters away.

My mother stood, walked to Pearl, and hugged her. "Don't *do* this," my mother signed and said slowly, struggling to remember the ASL she had learned as a 70-year-old student. "Derrick loves you."

Pearl stood stock-still.

"We *all* love you. Come back *home*."

Pearl shook her head and signed, "Stop!" She walked away.

Mother returned to our table. "That is not the Pearl I knew."

"What's she doing here?" said Father. "She's not here for my birthday."

"I haven't a clue. She has no friends left on Bowen, and she doesn't go to hearing events alone; she prefers to go with a deaf friend."

About an hour later, as we were standing by the bandstand listening

1988: Paranoia

to a jazz quintet, we saw Pearl in the crowd, still alone. We were so unnerved by her behavior that none of us dared to wave. She walked toward us and, as she passed by my brother's stroller, paused and leaned forward to see her first niece. For her baby's safety, my sister-in-law instinctively shoved the stroller beyond Pearl's reach.

Pearl became furious, manic. Her eyes burned into mine.

"Psychological abuse! You! You gave me psychological abuse! Now I understand what you did to me!" "I'm so *mad!*"

We could only stare, as did other fair-goers, and we were alarmed to be near her. I was thankful we were not alone together.

Pearl turned and stormed off.

The date was 27 August 1988. We would never see each other again.

Pearl's feelings had changed from fear to loathing in six months. Her counseling had achieved nothing but alienation from everyone because she now believed her *internal* paranoia was *external* abuse. If Pearl had told her counselors even part of the fantasies she told the RCMP, how could they fail to see she was sick? The RCMP could see she was sick and needed psychiatric care, and they weren't psychologists. Yet her so-called counselors told Pearl she was a victim of abuse and, therefore, the solution was divorce. It was as if their misandrogynistic paradigm drove their business model, and they were not about to lose a client.

The police called me. "This is Corporal Argue from North Vancouver RCMP. Your wife is still coming in and harassing us about the police being in the drug trade. She never mentions *you* anymore; now she's only after *us*. Do you know anyone who can guide her to a mental health practitioner? Her family doctor, a friend, or a relative?"

"I asked everyone I know to help her, but I don't think anyone did."

"Then how about her parents? How can we contact them? We'd like to help Pearl, not just keep throwing her out."

"Her mother lives on East Fourth, around the corner from you. Her phone is listed under her husband's name."

"She told us her mother lives in Alberta!"

"She's lying so you can't call her. Call me if there's anything I can do."

Two weeks later, I called Leo and asked him to help by searching us

in the police databases.

He reported, “You have two records: when your dog was impounded and when your wife tried to have you arrested. Pearl has a large file. Most recently, she was arrested by the RCMP under Section 27.”

“What is ‘Section 27?’”

“Section 27 of the Mental Health Act is for involuntary admission to a ‘psychiatric facility’—what we used to call an asylum—for up to three days. By the way, we don’t have prisons anymore; now we have ‘correctional facilities.’ Pearl had accused her neighbors of theft and she had threatened them. She was already well known to the North Vancouver RCMP, so, when she made these threats, they decided she was a hazard to herself and others, and they arrested her. She was then admitted for a psychiatric examination. The file doesn’t say what happened after that because the police were no longer involved.”

“I hope Pearl will now see herself as a sufferer of mental illness, not as a victim of conspiracy and abuse. What impression does her file make?”

“Loony but harmless, not to be taken seriously. I saw her in Gold’s Gym last week. It’s expensive—how can she afford to work out there?”

“She received a \$20,000 payout two months ago. Did she say hello?”

“I smiled at her, but she scowled at me, and then she ignored me.”

My departure day grew closer. I savored each remaining day as the damp autumn grayness returned and the clocks were turned back to winter time. Every time I drove onto the Howe Sound Queen, I tried to be first in line so I could park at the chain gate across the bow. There, I had unobstructed views of the mountains and the stars over Howe Sound on clear nights while the ferry gently rolled. It was magic, and I hated to leave. I felt defeated by fate. Pearl and I should have been together.

I drove the jeep around one more time before I parked it and covered it for the last time. I drove to Eagle Cliff and walked up the path to Stanley’s house, but the house had vanished as if it had never existed. Their trailer had been vandalized and was surrounded by weeds.

Alan and Rose took the sheep and the goats to auction. As they led Mothergoat and Scapegoat to the truck, Dream smashed through the barn door and ran after them; only the electrified gate had stopped him

1988: Paranoia

from following his beloved caprine friends. A few days later, Dream's owner came to walk him away. It had been two years and thousands of dollars since he arrived, and she had never ridden him once.

I refilled the cat food in the repurposed duck feeder, switched off the fence, and swept the barn. The barn was deserted except for the cat, who could survive on her own. I stared at the *DE MAL EN PIS* sign over the barn door, *From Bad To Worse*—how prophetic that curse had been.

I gave Whisky and the kittens away and sold the surplus fodder. Trout Lake Farm had grossed \$11,000 from horse boarding plus \$5,000 from meat and hay, with \$4,000 in expenses. It had consumed 21 metric tons of hay and nine tons of grain, all of it handled by Pearl and me. It was healthy, satisfying, unforgettable fun.

The finishing touch to the house was secondhand broadloom laid by a hippie who lived in a geodesic dome, drove a truck with a cedar-shake roof, and gave his customers free marijuana. With this, the house was finished. It was appraised at \$185,000, but my debts equaled its value.

My parents moved into the house and cared for it as if it were their own. They adopted the cat, had her spayed, built a house for her, and kept her on the porch instead of alone in the barn.

Bowen Freight shipped my goods. I walked around the property for the last time. I walked around the empty barn and listened to my footsteps on the concrete. Only then did I realize that I hadn't heard my footsteps in the barn for years because the sound had been masked by bleating, neighing, and grunting, and by the clatter of horseshoes.

I walked to the top of the upper field, climbed the stool I had carved into a tree stump, and smoked the joint the carpet-layer had given me. From there, I saw the greenest grass in the field grew over Mouse's grave. I turned my collar against the wind and walked to Trout Lake.

In the house, I wandered from room to room, sad that Pearl would never see our house completed. It now had broadloom, a fireplace, electric heat, and locks that all took the same key. It was a wonderful house, no longer a construction site. The house had been a beast that nearly swallowed us, but the beast had, at last, been tamed.

My parents drove me to the ferry with two suitcases. Cormorants walked on the dock. Gulls and grebes floated near the boats in the

marina. The air was salty and crisp.

“The property is *jinxed*,” Luisa had cried in frustration three years ago. She had been wrong. The jinx was on Pearl.

Nov: Letters From Amsterdam

As my flight from Vancouver passed over Bowen Island, I looked down at Trout Lake. What a special place, so hard to leave behind.

I arrived in Amsterdam like a sailor putting ashore after a storm, disoriented, unable to lose my sea legs. I dreamed of Pearl every night; I dreamed of Bowen Island every night. I had had the time of my life with Pearl on Bowen Island, beyond the sidewalks, and I knew it. After reaching the peak, one no longer needs to climb, so I lived to work now, instead of working to live. I now lived the serial life Ralph had mocked.

After Bowen Island’s community, I wanted city anonymity, where one never meets anybody one knows or knows anybody one meets. I told no one about Pearl—who would believe our story? Every night, I bolted my apartment door to hide from the world. Dutch conversation excluded me as much as English conversation had excluded Pearl; I realized now how Pearl felt when I’d been too lazy to interpret for her.

I was miserable, crying and feeling hollow inside, unable to accept how our lives had blown apart so quickly; I was in denial, and I may have been clinically depressed. I wrote the first of three letters to Pearl. It took days to write. It was the most passionate—and the longest—letter I ever wrote.

In my letter, I reminisced about our past. I sought to rekindle the feelings I thought Pearl once had for me, to reduce her anxiety, and to explain that the accusations she made about me, police, family, friends, and others were unreasonable. I said they pointed to a problem with how she *saw* the world, not with the world itself, and her point of view was made worse by the counselors she had seen at the Resource Centre for Abused Women. I urged her not to let her past ruin her future and to try one more time to make our relationship work. I asked her to come and visit me and talk things over in a fresh environment.

1988: Paranoia

I told her I lived in Amsterdam and had started an assignment with the same bank, but with computers, and was making more money. I thanked her for insisting I complete my MBA. I told her I borrowed more money and finished the whole house, and my parents were looking after it. I said I hoped we could move back to it someday. I described my life in Amsterdam and how we could start a family without the pressures of her job and the pressures of the unfinished house. I begged Pearl to join me in my apartment. Then, we'd return to the house in two years. I said I had a small apartment, a new car, and friends from Canada who had a little girl. I told Pearl I had five weeks' annual holiday, so we could see much of Europe in my car, and she could meet deafies from many countries. I urged her at least to take a short holiday with me, to come and sign with me and think things over.

I told her that even though I signed divorce papers before I left Canada, we were still married for another year. I told her I wanted her to be with me, and I could stop the divorce if she wanted; she only had to tell me. I said I thought of her all the time and couldn't keep my hands still when I talked to people because the signs still came. I gave her my address and telephone number. I promised her she wouldn't have to worry about anything anymore and this was a perfect place to start over. I begged her to write to me or call me via the MRC. I promised to send her a return ticket (which would have cost me a month's salary) as soon as she asked me.

I closed my letter with: Write or call me. Do it now. It's so important. I would marry you all over again because you were so wonderful for so long.

Even after all the pain and upheaval, I was still waiting for her—the woman who had entered my heart, not the one who had broken it. If my family had known about my invitation, they would have been horrified.

1989: Divorce

Feb: Someone Switched the Diamonds

When my goods arrived, I watched my hands lift my former life out of cardboard cartons. The first boxes gave up my stereo, music, and tequila. I poured a shot, then more. I played my Peggy Lee vinyl record and listened to “Is That All There Is?”, the ultimate existential anthem. Memories flooded in as I unpacked. *There* were our work gloves. *There* were our whitewash-splattered overalls riddled with barbed-wire holes. *There* was our meat grinder. There, in an apartment in Amsterdam, I was alone. I hung Pearl’s overalls in my cupboard, cried for her, staggered back, and collapsed on the floor. I could not release my love for her.

As Hans had suggested the night Pearl left, I read the Psalms, starting from Number 23. I went on to read the New Testament, a journey my grandfather, who was a Wesleyan minister, had made many times, but I remained a non-believer.

I wandered the cobblestoned streets and looked for sign language, but the deafies in Holland were invisible. I saw Pearl’s visage in every pretty black-haired woman. I would awaken in the middle of the night, sweating, worried I had missed her telephone call. But my telephone remained silent. I didn’t buy a TV, for it would intrude into my solitude.

Never did I do the right thing: talk to people. All I could see inside a Dutch bar was acrid Samson tobacco smoke and people who would make it necessary to lie about my past or to try to explain it. But how could I explain why I was oblivious to flaws that were obvious to others and why I married women who left me to become mistresses or mental patients? At work, I only revealed that I was divorced, presumably once. Instead of talking, I wrote. I wrote the first draft of this book as bibliotherapy, while my memory was fresh and I still had the documents.

Exchanging letters with Virgil comforted me. Our friendship had outlasted my marriages. He was a college graduate, New York City Jew,

1989: Divorce

the son of a champion boxer, and an outlaw. He could be heartless, insulting, and scheming but never with me. I would save 455 pages of correspondence with Virgil over the years.

25 January 1989

Dear Virgil,

I hope Bowen Island will still be there for me when I come back. I went through hell trying to finish it off, trying to finish up at work, and trying to forget about Pearl—I wasn't successful at the third one. I still think about her every day. It's so tragic for her. I haven't been close to a woman since. And I'm not about to be gay, so life's pretty boring. I have to take matters into my own hands, so to speak. The change of scenery keeps me busy, and work is just as interesting here and with more holidays (7 weeks!). I've driven to France, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, West Germany, and East Germany.

Love, Derrick

Dear Derrick,

My spirits soared when I got your letter. You're off and running on a new adventure. Have at it. Don't go falling in love with anyone that isn't rich, and for that advice I expect to be supported for the rest of my life when you do marry a rich French woman. No reason for French except I like France and it would be great visiting your France country manor.

Don't worry about Pearl. Men are supposed to love and lose. Next time rich, nothing else—but if you get good looks with it so much the luckier. I don't take my own advice but Rhea does own a house of her own so she has someplace to go if it ends. Next time rich, nothing else will do.

Winter has had its storms but all and all it's been fun and full of adjustments on both of us. One must have a city and country manor remember that Derrick.

I'm too stoned to write more. Soon I'll be down to one syllable words then Xs. Have fun and remember, Rich with a French accent, two homes, and good looks if it happens. Good luck.

Love, Virgil

3 February 1989

Dear Virgil,

1989: Divorce

I must admit I feel homesick when you describe your winter in the woods. I miss it so. The longing for Pearl has passed, but I still miss Whisky the dog and Scape, the goat.

I haven't been taking photos of Europe. Since Pearl, I just haven't felt I have to record my life for anyone. No love life. I don't bother with it anymore. Love has already got me in too much shit.

Love, Derrick

The telephone rang in the middle of the night; it could only be Pearl. I leaped out of bed and ran to the telephone. My heart pounded. She had read my letter!

“This is the Message Relay Centre with a call for Derrick from Pearl.”

“This is Derrick.” I held my breath, hoping to hear, “I’m getting help and I feel better,” but her reply felt like a slap in the face.

“Where is the diamond ring appraisal? Go ahead.”

“If I have it, I will send it to you. Go ahead.”

While the interpreter typed my response, she said, “Where are you?”

“Amsterdam. It’s three o’clock in the morning here.”

“Someone switched the diamonds in my ring. Go ahead.”

“That’s impossible. Go ahead.”

“Is there any other message?” said the interpreter, after a long pause.

I took a deep breath. “No.”

Paranoia and delusion! I felt devastated. Her call meant that she tried to pawn the beautiful ring I made for her, and she found pawnshops don’t pay the appraised value. I couldn’t sleep.

In the morning, I found our appraisal: *VVS1-G, 1.1 CT*, the De Beers code for love. It was for \$9,325, two or three times more than a pawnshop might offer. I mailed it to her with my second of three letters.

My second letter was shorter than the first and more cautious. I told her I was happy to get her call, but I was sad that she thought someone had “switched the diamonds” because that was impossible; her ring was welded so the stones couldn’t be removed. I told her thieves don’t switch diamonds; they steal the whole ring. I told her I was sorry she felt the way she felt and I didn’t understand why she felt that way. I told her I was waiting faithfully and there had been no woman after her. I urged her to write to me or visit me, and again I offered to send her a ticket. I

1989: Divorce

told her I would always love her. But this time, I didn't expect a reply.

6 May 1989

Dear Virgil,

I've been working on a story about my life with Pearl. I've relived the whole four years over and over in my mind. One thing I still can't be sure of is what would have happened if I had been a boring person, although I think most likely she would have eventually "flipped" or "revealed herself" anyway. I think it was mainly the deafness ("people talk about me behind my back") and the gang-bang ("men are not to be trusted") that destroyed her life, and nearly mine. Looking back, I'm amazed I slept with a .32 a foot away and never used it on myself. I came damn close. Compared to Pearl, Eugénie was just a boring friend.

Job's good. No girls I've bothered to ask out. They're unappealing, married, or both. France is too far away, but I agree with you! I try to keep busy. I ride horseback, but compared to Bowen/Farm/Pearl life here is like being retired. Oh, well, all in all, it is better than staying in my house on Bowen and seeing Pearl's face everywhere because she helped build it. I understand 100% why you burned your first house down. But after Pearl, God, how can I ever find another woman interesting?

Love, Derrick

PS, sorry it took so long to write. I've been a bit depressed. Nothing serious.

30 May 1989

Dear Derrick,

I feel terrible not writing sooner. There's never enough time in the day to do everything but when you look back it always seems as though one has wasted most of the time wondering what to do next.

I understand your lonely feelings, but you are not so much lonely as alone. And that isn't as terrible as you may think. Here's a phrase I live by and I know if you take it to your heart you too can laugh with it. THIS TOO WILL PASS. It helps me in times when my friends used me, when I felt The Man was on to me (PARANOIA), times I was too high for my own good.

I don't mind your ruminating about Pearl. I'm glad you trust

1989: Divorce

me with your feelings but remember This Too Will Pass. Once in awhile kick yourself in the ass and remember This Too Will Pass. It is a shame the girls are so ugly but remember _ _ _ _ fill the blanks. You know what control pussy has over men, but unfortunately, "THAT TOO WILL PASS"!

Love, Virgil

18 June 1989

Dear Virgil,

I like your phrase, This too will pass. I had hoped that when Pearl was nuts it would pass. I guess it did pass-she left! But that is not what I had in mind. I think I finally got Pearl out of my system. I understand how the priests do it. I don't want the bullshit anymore but I did buy a queen-size bed, so perhaps my subconscious is trying to tell me something. And I can sleep on both sides of the bed and only have to wash the sheets half as often. You know the real reason I came to Europe? A wounded dog will run into the forest and not come home until he has healed. It's like that for me. I pass my nights reading in cloistered seclusion, waiting for a letter from Pearl that never comes.

Love, Derrick

5 July 1989

Dear Derrick,

Yes, I can remember the same things you are going through happening to me. I want to inspect all the priests' hands for calluses. I'm glad you didn't get a single bed, one can never give up the hunt. Till the dick gets soft the brain stays soft. Pussy is pussy ya know.

We haven't had rain for four months. I think it's time for a rain dance. I'd better get out my Indian Head Dress and my tail feathers. Let me see how does it go, one, two, three, kick, one, two, three, kick. Never mind I'll just do the boss nova. Before I continue I'll partake in a line excuse me for a moment.

Well, now that that's out of the way I'll continue. Did you find a beautiful French woman? Don't tell me, I'll be jealous. Rhea offered to wear a wig but it just isn't the same.

Love, Virgil

Jul:**Twice Divorced**

From Clifford, I received a copy of our divorce certificate based on one year of separation. A week later, I received a letter from another lawyer stating Pearl was filing for divorce from me! I telephoned Clifford.

“How is it possible that Pearl’s lawyer doesn’t know she’s divorced? This is surreal. Now she’s asking for more furniture in return for the stereo in the truck, which she wants to remove and mail to Amsterdam.”

“I’m not surprised. Your divorce was surprisingly difficult. You didn’t know where she was living, so serving documents by registered mail was impossible. A Process Server, in uniform, had to visit her place of employment, which is the post office, and ask the management to take him to her and to identify her. Then he had to confirm Pearl’s identity from the photo you gave me. When he tried to serve her the documents, she became hostile, so he had to throw them at her feet. Imagine what her colleagues thought! Then he had to swear an Affidavit of Service. This is her third divorce lawyer, by the way. I’ll call him now.”

I was sad to hear Pearl had paid three divorce lawyers. Eugénie hadn’t paid even for one. Clifford called back to confirm we were divorced.

I wrote Pearl for the third and last time. My last letter was short. I told her we were divorced. I told her that I had signed the papers before I left Canada and I had paid for the divorce. I reminded her that divorce was not what I wanted; it was what *she* wanted. I told her I still loved her. I told her I wanted to hold her in my arms again, see her smile, and hear her cute laugh. I told her I missed the sweet and trusting Pearl I used to know. I didn’t offer to send her a ticket. I asked her to write me.

Nov:**All the Awful Things**

Sometimes I felt guilty to think that our problem might have been that Pearl could only trust a simple man whom she could understand and control. It took me years to see that our problem was never cultural or intellectual incompatibility; she was falling apart, with long periods of remission, and I had failed to see it. For Pearl, there was no Mr. Right.

1989: Divorce

15 November 1989

Dear Derrick,

Pearl called me. This was her first contact since I visited her at your request, to explain once again why I left you and why her fears about you are groundless. At that time she was completely uninterested in my visit and in the truth, so I was amazed to be contacted now, two years later! She wanted to get together and discuss "all the awful things you did" to both of us. I told Pearl never to call me, and I hung up. I trust I took appropriate course of action.

Regards, Eugénie

I wrote Eugénie to thank her for her support, but we moved on with our lives on opposite sides of the planet, and we never saw each other again.

27 November 1989

Dear Virgil,

I got a letter from Eugénie who said that Pearl had phoned her! She wanted to get together with Eugénie and discuss "all the awful things" I did to both of them. Eugénie hung up on her.

I went to Spain, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Norway, Sri Lanka, India, Maldives (12 scuba dives!), Nepal, and Pakistan. I wanted to look up my Spanish pen-pal, but her address was in my little black book that Pearl handed to the police, lost forever. In ten days I fly to Egypt and Kenya to spend Christmas alone. I'll go overland to Tanzania and Uganda. I have a ticket to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Burma in March.

I just buy air tickets and figure out what to do while on the road. I like being on the move. I like the sense of disconnection from the present, or maybe of leaving something behind. "He travels fastest who travels alone," said Kipling.

No women, still celibate. For the first year A.D. (After Disaster) I felt rotten. I couldn't imagine doing it all over again. Plus—something inside was holding on to a ray of hope, I think.

When not traveling I read, write, ride horseback, sail (a friend has a sailboat) and tinker with toys. I'd rather be cutting firewood or shoveling horseshit on Bowen, but that must wait.

Deep Inside I feel that I did everything right with Pearl—and it still didn't work. So piss on it. I'll go where I go and do what I do

1989: Divorce

and if a good woman wants to join me, fine. But at this rate, it's going to take forever, and while the quality and quantity available to a foreigner are low, so is the effort I am willing to make.

Love, Derrick

1990: Estrangement

Mar:

Absolved from Guilt

A year had passed since Pearl had called. I was not seeking a girlfriend, and my self-censorship prevented new intimate friendships. I pursued my career, confident I would soon join my parents on Bowen Island.

2 March 1990

Dear Virgil,

I can't tell you how much I enjoy getting your letters. When we met in 1973 I knew you were a special person.

How can you describe the purring of a BMW boxer—pistons lovingly cleaned—at dry desert dawn through painted canyons, deserted New Mexican twisties, running on flight fuel?

How can you explain sweat, noise, and dirt, week after month after year, breaking bones, building a house, seeing everything right and wrong everywhere? And the woodstove! How it warms the heart, bones, body, and soul at day's end!

How can you explain oiling up, reaching in past your elbow, and pulling out—a kid (her mother knew you saved her life.) People stopped asking about my weekends after hearing about castration.

How can you describe the woman: the most classically beautiful, intelligent, rugged girl in the world; holding her so tight oh so very tight because you knew how those men raped her, beat her, almost killed her in the night and left her for dead on a prairie roadside. The doctors sewed her up and wept.

How can you share the horror when her echoes came back to haunt her and she keel-hauled your psyche. It was paranoid hell (for there was no tomorrow)? So I just shut up or be seen as weird. I prefer the latter because life is short, but people get suspicious and prefer the former.

Love, Derrick.

Dear Derrick,

You're an OK guy and you can stop beating yourself, I absolve

1990: Estrangement

you of all guilt.

I can't believe Pearl calling Eugénie. I'm glad she hung up on her.

Jim got busted by the DEA. They have begun to seize his property. He's paranoid (nothing new) and wishes you were here to use that little box to see if "they're watching him." I told Jim he's already been busted with 200 marijuana plants so what else can they find? But he's got conspiracy on the brain.

My lawyer friend said I should ask every visitor to sign a waiver the first time they come on the cablecar. What people will do for money. I trust you—but what about your crazy ex-wife?

The human race is racing to oblivion and I'd hate to have you run over on the way. Now that's philosophical ain't it. I bought a new Kubota tractor. What else? Oh yes, a straw hat and wheat straw in my mouth.

Love, Virgil.

Ten days after I wrote to Vigil, I was traveling in Asia when I chanced on the woman who would become my third wife. I decided to put my past behind me, and I proposed marriage. It was Oscar Wilde's "triumph of hope over experience." My third wedding was set for 16 June, in Manila.

May: You Wrote Me Three Letters

One month before I remarried, my telephone rang at 4:00 a.m, so it was 7:00 p.m in Vancouver. I was gobsmacked—it could only be Pearl. The timing was bizarre. If she had called me before I had become engaged, I would have listened to her. If she had been asking for help, I would have given it. If she had been asking to visit, I would have sent her a ticket. I had never stopped loving Pearl, but she called me just after I had given up on her; now I couldn't talk to her without being unfaithful to my fiancée. Why had she waited so long to call me?

"Message Relay Centre with a call to Derrick from Pearl."

"How are you? I'm fine. Go ahead," said Pearl through the operator.

"I'm fine. How are you? Go ahead."

"I already said I'm fine. Why do you ask me again? Go ahead."

"Because it is four o'clock in the morning, and I'm sleepy. Go ahead."

1990: Estrangement

“You did not call me. Go ahead.”

“You never told me your telephone number. I wrote to you many times. Why didn’t you write to me? Go ahead.”

“You wrote me three letters. Go ahead.”

“You wrote me no letters. I waited for two years.”

If the Pearl I once loved had been calling to ask for help or reconciliation, she would not have started the call by absurd bickering. Because of a chance encounter, I was engaged now, and everything had changed. I had estranged Eugénie for Pearl; now I had to estrange Pearl, too, for my fiancée and my future children.

“Please don’t call me anymore.” It crushed me to say it. I could never have imagined I would ever say this to Pearl, not for as long as I lived.

I hung up the telephone, defeated by fate. It rang again.

“Message Relay Centre with a call to Derrick from Pearl.”

“Why did you hang up? I wasn’t finished yet. Go ahead.”

“Never call me again,” I whispered, and I unplugged the telephone.

2020: Clarity

Life on Her Own

In 2019, through the Internet, I reconnected with Pearl's family. We shared our research into her genealogy and our knowledge of her life. I learned her family had known she was unstable, destructive, and violent, and her mother had sent her to psychiatrists, but after a family discussion, they decided to withhold this information from me because they could see how much we loved each other and they wanted to give Pearl a chance to have the family she always talked about. We all shared a deep love for Pearl, and if I had been in their position, I would have given her another chance, too. The family silence, intended to support her, gave her three happy years of remission followed by three terrifying years of struggle before she was diagnosed and began psychotherapy.

In February 1990 at 37, three months before she called me for the last time, Pearl was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Her mother made a declaration to the Supreme Court that Pearl had become incapable of managing herself or her affairs because of mental infirmity. Pearl lost the legal capacity to make decisions about her treatment, finances, property, and residence, and the Court appointed a Public Guardian and Trustee to make these decisions on her behalf. Pearl benefited in three ways. First, she was required, by law, to follow the decisions of her trustee, including taking medication. Second, she was more likely to accept the counsel of a neutral party, instead of ignoring the advice of her mother. Third, she could rebuild her relationship with her mother because her mother was freed from responsibility for her. Pearl began lifelong treatment, lost her job at the post office, and began living on long-term disability and government assistance. For a few years, she lived in an apartment, then she was moved to the group home for deaf people where she lives today. She never had children.

We had been lucky that Frank's fraud caused us to postpone children;

if we had started a family, I hate to think what the result would have been for us and for our child. I had been lucky that the Resource Centre for Abused Women's misandrist support for Pearl, and that of other misguided helpers like Arlette, had guided her out of my life before she dragged me down with her, but it had been a disaster for Pearl, reinforcing her delusions, "helping" her to leave the best life she would ever have, and delaying her diagnosis and treatment by two years. By then, Pearl had lost two husbands, two homes, three chances at a family, her job, and her independence. I had been lucky she called me for the last time after I had a fiancée, and so I refused to speak to her.

In 1995 at 34, Pearl's brother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, too, seeing conspiracies everywhere and himself as the authority. He believes, on or off medication, that there is nothing wrong with him. Like Pearl, he had been unable to maintain healthy relationships for any length of time. Unlike Pearl, he lives on the streets.

In 1998 at 45, my parents saw Pearl in McDonald's, looking "like a burned-out shopgirl." She rudely turned her back on my parents, who had loved her and tried so much to help her.

In 2008 at 55, Pearl joined a 2004 class-action lawsuit against the Alberta School for the Deaf, one of 12 class-action lawsuits launched against deaf schools across Canada by the same lawyer. In her statement, Pearl named teachers whom she said had fondled her to orgasm, raped her, and sodomized her, the sodomy witnessed by a female teacher. She claimed all but one incident took place by the age of twelve. She claimed that as a result of being sexually abused there, "school destroyed my life," she was "so messed up" after high school, and she "developed schizophrenia." The lawsuit was denied under the Statute of Limitations. Her claims are not credible. First, Pearl was a gifted storyteller who talked all the time about her school when she was on home leave, and she enjoyed telling her family about the pranks the students played on the staff. She enjoyed going to school, and she never hinted to her family that anything was wrong there, nor to me when we stood together in the places where she alleged the incidents had occurred. Second, she first mentioned sexual abuse after she became a plaintiff, certainly after she hoped to win half a million dollars and

2020: Clarity

probably after suggestive interviewing. Third, her sexual abuse stories changed every time she told them to her family, becoming more horrific each time. Fourth, although her mental health began to deteriorate in high school, when she graduated her episodes were rare and brief and she functioned well; she went on to college, graduated, worked, and married—she was not “so messed up” when she left high school as she claimed. Fifth, for most of her life, she had blamed her mother for everything that went wrong in her life and had sent her threatening letters; only now, when her mother was 75, did she blame her school. Sixth, she had invented another useful story of sexual abuse: after her abortion at 28, she created her three-man abduction-and-gang-rape story about her acquaintance-rape at 17 to conceal her abortion scar. Seventh, she was the last of 83 plaintiffs to join the lawsuit; it took her four years either to recover her memories or to feel they were worth stating. Eighth, there is no evidence that childhood sexual abuse causes schizophrenia, but there is proof that schizophrenia causes distorted memory.

In 2020 at 67, after decades of medication and counseling, her paranoia and wrath still surface so easily that everyone speaking to her, even family members, must choose conversation topics carefully.

Many details about Pearl’s life will never be known because her mother concealed the extent of Pearl’s problems until she died, in 2018. Even while Pearl was leaving me, her mother only told her siblings that “she wasn’t listening to her” and “she was making Derrick’s life hell.” My father’s warnings had been prescient: the Jericho Hill School for the Deaf and the Western Institute for the Deaf both retain psychiatrists.* Her schizophrenia was not caused by her deafness, but her deafness compounded it by masking the state of her mental health. If a hearing woman had told me the things Pearl told me, I would have known

* “Dr. Freeman is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at UBC and a Consultant at the Jericho Hill School for the Deaf, Western Institute for the Deaf, and Children’s Diagnostic Center.”—Roger D. Freeman *et al*, *Psychosocial Problems of Deaf Children and Their Families: A Comparative Study*. American Annals of the Deaf (August 1975; 120-4). pp. 391-405. Gallaudet University Press.

something was wrong and so would anyone who tried to help her.

While Pearl struggled with schizophrenia, I left hobby-farming behind, followed my career around the world, and prospered. I remarried, had a family, and continued to live abroad. Decades later, after the fields had reverted to forests, I sold the Bowen Island property to Roku's son.

Could I have had my career with a deaf wife? Absolutely. With a wife so disabled by mental illness that she was unable to manage her own affairs, even with treatment? It would have been cruel to make her change environments, friends, languages, and doctors every few years; and it would have been impossible because many countries require good health and clean police records before approving long-stay visas.

While my relationship with Pearl was unraveling and I was struggling to deal with the consequences, I didn't understand that Pearl herself was unraveling. Now that I know the truth, I feel sorry she suffered for most of her life, thinking that the people closest to her were out to get her.

It was an honor to have been Pearl's husband. We gave each other the best years of our lives, we packed a lifetime into them, and I reunited with her many times in my dreams. Watching her collapse had been like suffering the slow death of a partner with no way to say goodbye. I cherish all our years together, no matter how painful. Pearl was destroyed by mental illness. I hope she has found peace.

Fabrication of Reality

Pearl had fabricated key parts of the life history she told me, but she was probably not lying consciously; her mind created memories that were as real for her as her first husband's homosexuality, her partner Eddy's alcoholism, and her last husband's attempted murder. Her fabrications were her way of eliminating unpleasant memories, of leaving her past behind, and of moving forward; they had become her reality.

Pearl's ancestors had fabricated key parts of their life history, too, which made it even harder for Pearl to understand herself. She wrote, "When my father was 2 years old, I don't remember who took him when her mother had heart attack and laid down on kitchen floor and left my

father alone.” In fact, his mother died, still in hospital, two weeks after his birth; there was no kitchen floor, no heart attack, no being alone. She often told me that her mother spoke evasively about her father’s ancestry, but that was because her mother didn’t know anything more about it *because he didn’t know anything more himself*. The censor was Pearl’s father’s Adventist adoptive mother, Ida, who had done her best to make sure no one knew anything about Pearl’s abominable grandfather.

From the time of Pearl’s father’s adoption, Ida had estranged Pearl’s grandfather. When Pearl’s father became a dropout and made his girlfriend pregnant, as his father had done, Ida began to estrange herself from him, too. She did not attend his wedding and rarely saw him again, much as the Adventist church prescribes censure for unrepentant sinners. Ida told Pearl’s father nothing about his ancestry even after he became a faithful husband, a father of four, and a senior manager of a petroleum refinery. In 1959, Pearl’s father became curious about his ancestry and decided to bypass Ida and search for his father with the help of the RCMP—she then fully estranged herself from her adopted son, and his family never saw her again. She did not attend his funeral. Because Ida had hidden half of Pearl’s ancestry, Pearl and her siblings couldn’t form a complete picture of who they were until the Internet and the publishing of public records made genealogical research feasible.

Although her childhood was a happy, loving one, as her whole family attested, Pearl was always paranoid. She would sense when anyone spoke behind her back, and she often accused people of speaking or snickering about her even when they were not doing so.

As she grew up, she would occasionally lash out in small incidents that disappeared as quickly as they came. Her minor episodes increased in frequency and severity until, at 13, she had her first major episode: she violently attacked her five-year-old brother. Her sister tackled her and held her until she calmed down. Pearl’s minor episodes disturbed those around her but would leave her life in remission unchanged. Later, her major episodes would damage her relationships, property, or memories so seriously that her life would never fully recover.

Her father’s death at 14 was a terrible blow, but boarding school

insulated her from the resulting moving around and school-changing that her siblings had to endure. Pearl was very smart and did well in school, yet despite a police report exonerating her mother, she became convinced that her mother had deliberately caused his fatal accident. Her family eventually settled in Red Deer, where Pearl would join her eldest sister on her sister's dates whenever she was home from school.

In 1970 at 16, Pearl suffered her second major episode: she threatened her mother that she was going to get a gun and shoot her. Her mother sent her to psychiatrists a few times, but whenever a doctor questioned Pearl's version of events, she refused to see that doctor again. Despite her mother's best efforts, Pearl would only see counselors who didn't question her stories, so she didn't get the help she needed, a pattern that would continue until she lost her legal independence.

In 1971 at 17, Pearl finished school and was raped. She and her sister had gone to a dance at the Sylvan Lake Hall, near Red Deer. Pearl had agreed with her mother that she would go home with her sister, but when it was time to go home, she said her friend, a hearing man, was going to drive her home. Despite her sister's insistence, Pearl refused to go with her, and she left with her friend. The RCMP called at 5:00 a.m. to report that she was in the hospital after having been raped and left on a road near Sylvan. Her mother picked her up a few hours later. The rapist was sentenced to five years in prison. A decade later, Pearl turned this acquaintance-rape into a gang-rape in order to hide her abortion.

Deafie friendships bored Pearl. Over and over, she would meet hearies, who would be intrigued because she was vivacious and pretty, and they would make Pearl the center of attention. But as soon as hearies accepted Pearl as an equal, she would break off their relationship; she would perceive an insult or simply no longer like them without ever being able to give a reason. Because her hearie relationships never lasted, her mother always encouraged her to socialize with deafies.

In 1974 at 20, Pearl attended St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute. She had the time of her life, she matured, and she met her first husband. She was in a hearing environment which was fully accessible, through interpreters, and she was surrounded by hearing students who were accustomed to seeing ASL. Pearl had told me she had a two-year diploma

as a Medical Laboratory Technologist, but she had only a one-year certificate as a Medical Laboratory Assistant, one of dozens of one-year vocational programs such as Dog Groomer, Keypunch Operator, and Bricklayer. A high school diploma was not required of deaf applicants, and 98 percent of all deaf applicants were accepted. Of those accepted, 92 percent did not have basic math proficiency and 97 percent did not have ninth-grade reading ability, so almost all the deaf entrants had to take a three-month Deaf Preparatory Program before they started their vocational programs with the hearing entrants; this was why Pearl called her one-year program as a two-year program. In addition to English and Mathematics, the Deaf Preparatory Program included Personal Management, covering banking, housing, budgeting, credit, insurance, tax, legal aid, grooming, and “the wise use of leisure time.” When they then started their vocational programs, with the hearing students, the deaf students had tutoring and extra support until they graduated, some of it provided by the hearing students.* Despite all this extra support, only two-thirds of the deaf entrants graduated. Pearl had succeeded.

In 1977 at 23, nine months after their wedding, Pearl became convinced her husband was homosexual. She left him and divorced him. The mere mention of his name by her family would result in a tirade. Her volatility increased, and occasionally she would explode and rage at everyone around her, destroying things and threatening to harm others. Over the years, she sent her mother shocking letters and TTY messages, discovered in a box after her death, that blamed her mother for everything that was not right in her world and threatened her with harm, even though she loved Pearl and had supplied advice and financial support to her whenever she had needed it.

In about 1980 at 27, Pearl moved in with hard-of-hearing Eddy, who was decent, quiet, and free of any signs of a drinking problem, according to her family. A year later, she got pregnant. Pearl knew what Eddy’s

* “Our files are full of unsolicited parent letters with statements such as: ‘We sent you a child, you returned an adult.’”—St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute, *Improved Vocational, Technical, and Academic Opportunities for Deaf Persons* (August 1974). p3.

drinking habits were, so her pregnancy was probably not accidental, yet she aborted their unborn child and left him. If her pregnancy had been unwanted, she would immediately have had an ordinary outpatient abortion, which does not leave a scar. But her abortion was not routine: her “gang-rape” scar was probably from a low-vertical-incision hysterotomy, a mini-Caesarean, which was used for late-term and complicated abortions, so she probably had aborted their child in her second trimester. It appears she had wanted to keep their baby for about three months after she discovered she was pregnant, and then became convinced Eddy was an alcoholic. She never changed her opinion about him being alcoholic, just as she never changed her opinion about her first husband being gay (he remarried and had a son), or me being murderous. From our first date, when she pulled down her pants to show me her scar, she had taken me into her confidence but also into her delusions.

In 1983 at 29, a year before we met, Pearl suffered the most violent episode known to her family: she went berserk in her New Westminster condominium and destroyed most of her furniture and possessions, including her television set. The trigger is unknown, but it may have been because the by-laws of her condominium did not permit her to rent it for income when she decided move out in order to hide from her friend Pat, whom she said had threatened her. To escape Pat, she rented an apartment across the street from me, and there our love story began.

Bequest of Deafness

Pearl’s deafness was probably not the result of random bad luck, but the result of her parents’ and grandparents’ rush to conceal her illegitimate conception from the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In March 1953, Pearl’s 20-year old father, a salesman, made his 19-year-old girlfriend pregnant. Premarital conception was disgraceful but common in those days; the Pill and abortion only became available 15 years later. Most families excused it if the parents-to-be married before the child’s birth, even if the mother was visibly pregnant, but both Pearl’s father’s adoptive mother, Ida, and Pearl’s mother’s parents were

Adventists. Her grandfather, Dorse, was so committed to the church that he had distributed tracts door-to-door in his teens, and by his fifties, he had founded two Adventist schools. It is hard to imagine a community less forgiving of teenage sex than the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the mid-twentieth century. The 1951 Church Manual said, “Among the grievous sins for which members shall be subject to church discipline are ... open violation of the law of God, such as ... fornication.”

Pearl’s teenage mother now had to inform her 47-year-old, church-elder father that she was pregnant and thus a “grievous sinner.” Single motherhood of an illegitimate child would have been scandalous, so Pearl’s mother had two options: (1) go into hiding, have the baby in secret, and give it up for adoption, or (2) marry Pearl’s father before the birth. Dozens of “homes for unwed mothers” operated in Canada to assist women to gestate, deliver, and give up their babies out of sight, but Pearl’s father, an orphan himself—or so he had been brought up to believe—would not have wanted to lose both his baby and his girlfriend.

But there was a catch: an Adventist pastor could not marry a pregnant woman. This prohibition, as well as the scandal which would have ensued if the violation of rules on fornication and chaperonage by Dorse’s daughter ever became known, had to be side-stepped in the short term by marrying *before her pregnancy was visible* and in the long term by obscuring the timing of the baby’s birth. After the wedding, Pearl’s parents would need to avoid her hometown for nine months because a leak about when the baby was born would identify Dorse as a sinner for not having reported his child: “If the leaders of the church neglect to diligently search out the sins ... they become responsible for these sins.”

Worse than the catch, there was a curse: Pearl’s mother hadn’t had German measles—rubella—so exposing herself to children during her first trimester put her fetus at extreme risk. Pearl was born 24 December, so she was probably conceived between 2 and 18 March. When her mother missed her first period between 12 and 29 March, she would have been terrified to tell her parents, and so she probably waited a month, hoping her next period would come. When she missed her second period, due between 9 and 26 April, she saw a doctor, but to minimize her parents’ outrage, she probably told everyone except her

boyfriend that she had missed one period, not two. When she told her Adventist parents she was pregnant, probably in late April, one can hardly imagine how furious they became.

Immediate marriage was agreed upon or imposed, and the invitations were rushed out in May. The large shotgun wedding was held on 29 June in the hamlet of Peoria, her hometown, when she was three months pregnant. Although it was announced as a happy occasion in the Adventist magazine, Pearl's mother saved no photos of her first wedding, suggesting it was not such a memorable occasion for the couple.

Pearl's mother probably caught measles from one of the children at her wedding. Pearl's deafness indicates that her mother was infected between 25 May and 19 July, probably between 1 June and 5 July. In the 1950s, nearly every Canadian adult was immune to rubella,* but because her mother had grown up on a farm, she had never been exposed to infectious children. The virus spreads by breathing, hangs in the air for hours, and, on first exposure, infects 90 percent of those who haven't previously had it. The wedding announcement mentions "several hundred guests," so dozens would have been children who came from far away because the population of the entire 2,900 sq km county is, today, 1,800. A few of those children would have been incubating measles, and measles is highly contagious a week before symptoms appear.

After her mother's infection, there was an 80 percent chance Pearl would be born with birth defects ranging from deafness to fatal heart disease. Because of her lack of immunity, Pearl's mother needed to avoid children for five months when she discovered she was pregnant, but she didn't know this. In the early 1950s, the link between measles and deafness was not widely known, even within the medical profession.

If Pearl's parents had married before having sex, or if they had used condoms, then Pearl would probably not have been born deaf. If Pearl's mother had gone to a maternity home, delivered the baby there, and

* "During the 1950s ... surveys indicated that 95 percent of the population had been infected with measles by the age of 15 years." —Alan Hinman *et al*, *Impact of Measles in the United States*, Review of Infectious Diseases (May-June 1983). pp. 439-444.

given it up for adoption, then Pearl would probably not have been born deaf, but she would have been an adoptee like her father. If Pearl's parents had married in a small, adults-only service, then Pearl would probably not have been born deaf. If Pearl's parents hadn't rushed into a traditional wedding followed by a large reception with children but had taken a few months to make their plans, then Pearl would probably not have been born deaf, but her parents would have had to marry outside the Adventist church, estranging all three of their parents as well as most of the community who would otherwise have attended.

To continue the subterfuge, immediately after the wedding Pearl's parents moved to tiny Bruderheim, 500 km from Peoria, to await their child's birth. If Pearl's mother had concealed her first missed period, her doctor would have predicted that the baby would be born in early 1954, making the timing of her conception easier to obscure: the couple were married in 1953 and could say they became parents in 1954. Pearl was born in Lamont, near Bruderheim, on Christmas Eve, 1953, profoundly deaf from Congenital Rubella Syndrome. The family's hide-the-pregnancy ruse had succeeded, but Pearl's hearing had been destroyed.

Jinx of Psychosis

Pearl's siblings inherited the foundation for schizophrenia,* and she and her brother developed the disease. *Congenital rubella* multiplied her risk of developing the disease by ten to 20 times,[†] *childhood deafness* by three

* "Schizophrenia is a developmental brain disorder that is caused by a combination of factors. The genetic component of schizophrenia is around 80 percent. The normal development of the fetal brain can subsequently be further disrupted by nonhereditary factors. Stress during pregnancy plays a role, too. The death of a relative increases the likelihood that a child will develop schizophrenia in later life." —Dick Swaab, *We Are Our Brains: From the Womb to Alzheimer's* (2014). ISBN 9780812992960.

[†] "20% of prenatally rubella-exposed subjects were diagnosed with adult schizophrenia, suggesting a 10 to 20-fold increase in risk." —Alan Brown, *Prenatal Infection as a Risk Factor for Schizophrenia*. *Schizophrenia Bulletin* (April 2006 Vol. 32 # 2) pp. 200-202.

times,* and the *childhood death of a parent* by three times.† To try to find the genetic source, I researched Pearl's obscure paternal ancestry.

Pearl's great-great-great-grandfather was born in Corsica in the late 18th century, immigrated to New Brunswick, and had 12 children. His son, Pearl's great-great-grandfather, was a chandler who was "very well known in Vancouver" and a member of many lodges and veterans' societies when he died at seventy-five. The first two generations had prospered.

Pearl's great-grandfather, the third generation, born in 1867, was the first to show signs of dysfunction. He left his prosperous family for England, where he became a pauper. He and his English wife had five children; three were born in England, the first two out of wedlock. He and his children, but not his wife, lived in the Medway Union Workhouse for months. One child died after leaving the workhouse. In 1906 at 39, he brought his wife and their two surviving children to Alberta. They had two more children; the first Canadian-born child was Pearl's grandfather. Ten years after arriving in Canada, he lied to the census that his family arrived five years ago. He was an iron-worker. His wife left him for another man, taking his two Canadian-born children with her, including Pearl's 10-year-old grandfather. She had one more child with her second husband, Pearl's grandfather's half-sister. When Pearl's great-grandfather's father died in 1919, he moved to Vancouver with his 18-year-old daughter and his 11-year-old son, Pearl's grandfather. His 21-year-old son had already left home and was in the army. At 58, he moved to the Provincial Home for Incurables, where he

* "Early exposure to hearing loss elevated the risk of later development of schizophrenia by a factor of 3." —Mascha Linszen *et al*, *Increased Risk of Psychosis in Patients with Hearing Impairment: Review and Meta-Analyses*. Neuroscience Biobehavioral Review (March 2016 #62) pp. 1-20.

† "Permanent separation from, or death of, one or both parents were associated with a more than threefold increased risk of schizophrenia." —Simona Stilo *et al*, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, *Environmental Risk Factors for Schizophrenia: Implications for Prevention*. Neuropsychiatry Review (2011; 1-5) pp. 457-466.

2020: Clarity

lived until he died at 66. On his death certificate, his daughter wrote he had died at 55, so he had lied to her about his age or she had lied to her husband and son about her dysfunctional family and her broken home.

Pearl's great-uncle was the brother and mentor of Pearl's grandfather. At 17, he was a newsboy. At 19, he became a Canadian citizen, joined the army during WW I, and was dispatched to England. He was sent to the front in France but was fined for being Absent Without Leave before he arrived. The war ended 75 days later. He was admitted to hospital with gonorrhoea and discharged after 29 days. A month later, he was admitted again with gonorrhoea and discharged after 39 days. A month later, he was fined again for being AWOL. At the end of his two-year service he was demobilized with a tattoo and with no medals, even though nearly every Canadian soldier in WW I received at least two medals, and he had spent almost as many days in hospital as he could have spent fighting.

At 22, he was working in a Vancouver tire garage when he married a 19-year-old waitress who was also from a broken home. Her parents divorced when she was young, and she was a naturalized Canadian even though her father still lived in the USA. One brother was jailed and another was murdered. On their marriage certificate, Pearl's great-uncle lied that he was born in Canada, and she lied that she was twenty-five. He moved to the USA the following year and lived with her father while she lived in Vancouver. Four years later, at 26, he remarried without divorcing, risking seven years in prison for bigamy. Her father was the witness for his second marriage, in an American courthouse, suggesting it had been a shotgun wedding and the 16-year-old girl was pregnant. He lied that he had never been married, lied that he was 21, and lied that he was American-born. In 1958 at 59, he died in an Ohio prison. His first wife married twice more, his second wife three times more.

Pearl's remarkable grandfather, the fourth generation, was born in 1908. Although Pearl knew nothing about him, this man's genes and his behavior set the course of her life. In 1919 and 1920, at ages ten and 12, he was convicted of delinquency and served time in the Vancouver Juvenile Detention Home; the average sentence was six weeks. He had no mother at home, a brother and sister who had left home, and a father

who labored in construction during the day. After being released from his second detention, he tried to enter the USA with his sister-in-law to join his beloved brother, but they were denied entry. At 14, he ran away from home and was apprehended by the police 150 km away. A week later, he tried again to enter the USA to join his brother and was denied entry. His runaway behavior paints a portrait of a troubled teen, quick to cheat while not caring about others and who lived his life on the brink of his own destruction. He became a logger. At 22, he made his 15-year-old girlfriend, Pearl's grandmother, pregnant. Child #1 was born out of wedlock and died of infection. At 24, he married Pearl's grandmother while she was five months pregnant. Two months later, Child #2, Pearl's father, was born. When he registered the birth, he lied that Pearl's father was their firstborn child. Two weeks later, without ever leaving the hospital, Pearl's grandmother died of infection at 17.

Her aunt Ida, an Adventist spinster who was 51 and blind, adopted Pearl's father. The fact that Pearl's father was adopted, not fostered, suggests that Ida was so concerned about Pearl's grandfather's behavior that she wanted to separate his baby from him. Thanks to him, Pearl's Adventist grandmother had been an unwed mother and then a pregnant bride. Ida obscured Pearl's grandfather so well that Pearl's father would grow up believing he was an only child, not one of 11 half-siblings.

At 26, a widower, he remarried to his first wife's elder sister. While she was eight months pregnant with his Child #3, he made his half-sister pregnant, risking 14 years in prison for both of them for incest. For one month, he had two women pregnant at the same time. At 28, Child #3 was born to his wife, dying of infection at six months, and Child #4 was born to his half-sister. He registered Child #4 under an alias.

When Child #4 died at 43, from cardiomyopathy due to malformed aortic and mitral heart valves, almost certainly from inbreeding, her death certificate said her father was "[Alias] born in France," and her mother was "Unknown born in Unknown," so Child #4 had estranged herself from her incestuous mother, who had married her half-brother under his alias when Child #4 was three and divorced him when she was eleven. Ida would have known all this but shielded Pearl's father from it; when he died at 35, his 5/8 sister was 31, but he never knew she existed.

2020: Clarity

At 30, Child #5 was born to his half-sister and died at five months. At 32, he married his half-sister under his alias without legally changing his name or divorcing his second wife—bigamy, risking five more years in prison. He could not secure a divorce from his second wife because the only practical grounds for divorce was adultery, and the innocent party had to petition; she may have refused to cooperate. In the marriage certificate, he lied that he was a bachelor and he invented false names for his parents. His second wife was his only wife who didn't fornicate, yet she was cuckolded and would die childless. Pearl's grandfather would live under his alias for the rest of his life.

At 39, his half-sister-and-third-wife divorced him, for adultery. He had cheated on his second wife with his to-be third wife; now he cheated on his third wife with his to-be fourth wife, who was half her age. He married his 17-year-old fourth wife under his alias in a civil service. He lied that he was divorced (he was not divorced from his second wife) and he invented new false names for his parents. For his four marriages, he used two names for himself and three pairs of names for his parents.

From 41 to 46, Children #6, #7, #8, #9, and #10 were born. Child #9 died in infancy. At 50, Pearl's grandfather, Child #7, and Child #8 drowned when he overloaded a boat with shingles. His widow was 29 and pregnant. Child #11 was born posthumously. His fourth wife remarried twice.

Pearl's incestuous, bigamist, criminal grandfather had at least 11 live births by four wives. Four were conceived out of wedlock, three were born out of wedlock, two were *in utero* simultaneously, two were the result of incest, and one was born posthumously. Four died in infancy, and two drowned with him. Only four children outlived him; of the four survivors, two had been estranged; of these two, the inbred one would die prematurely. His infant death rate of 35 percent was *four times higher* than the Canadian average, and the death rate of his illegitimate children was double that of his legitimate children, suggesting that not only had poverty played a role, but neglect. His sister was the only one of the three siblings to live respectably, and she went to her grave without telling her only child, a son, about her parents, her brothers, and her broken home.

Pearl's father, the fifth generation, was born in 1933, adopted at two weeks of age, and raised as an Adventist by his great-aunt Ida. After doing well and being a choir soloist, he dropped out of grade 12 and made his girlfriend pregnant. Although he was a hard-working, ambitious family man, he raced stock-cars and liked to drive recklessly. In 1965 at 32, he was fined for speeding. At 34, he was promoted, and the family was upgraded to a manager's house. For one glorious year, the family's future looked bright. Pearl wrote to me, "If my Dad is alive right now we would be multimillionaires," and her belief was well-founded: management positions in the petroleum industry are lucrative. But in 1968 at 35, he killed himself and injured his three children who were in his car with him when he raced against his wife's car; he was thrown out of his car, which crushed him. His reckless action echoed his estranged father, who killed himself and his two children who were in his boat with him when he operated a motorboat without due regard for safety.

Pearl's great-grandfather's and grandfather's *genes* had passed through Pearl's father to Pearl and to her brother, laying the foundation for their schizophrenia. Pearl's grandfather's reckless *behavior* led to Pearl's father's adoption into the Adventist community, then Pearl's father's reckless behavior resulted in Pearl's illegitimate conception that led to the wedding that deafened her. Her congenital rubella and her father's early death helped turn her inherited foundation into schizophrenia.

Pearl's paternal ancestors left a trail of dead and damaged children and wives. There is evidence of dysfunction in almost every paternal family member over generations and similar traits in many of the women they married, most of whom were pregnant and who would have multiple marriages. Pearl's great-grandfather and grandfather, and, later, her father and Pearl herself, conceived children out of wedlock. Pearl's great-grandmother and grandmother, and, later, her mother, and Pearl herself conceived children out of wedlock—four generations of similar male and female behavior. Pearl's father had been estranged and raised religiously, yet his ultimate disregard for the potential consequences of his actions on those he loved echoed his ancestors he never knew as if a powerful rebel gene had passed down the line: I had loved a deaf rebel.

Epilogue

It is so great to hear from you. We always liked you and thought you were the best thing to happen to Pearl. We often wondered where you were and how you were doing. We were so encouraged when you and Pearl got together. Pearl seemed so happy with you and we had not seen that before. From what we could see, Pearl truly loved you and we were hopeful that the life you made for yourselves would be just what Pearl needed.

I remember your place on Bowen Island and how excited we were for you guys; we couldn't wait to see everything completed. I never would have imagined Pearl living and working on Bowen Island, and I am amazed and proud of what she accomplished. Pearl was happy and funny and we had some great times before her illness took hold of her. It makes me sad that schizophrenia robbed her of what would have been a good life with you.

We struggled to decide whether or not to have a conversation with you about Pearl's history and felt it would be disloyal to do so. We thought this was a chance for her to have a good life and the children she talked about ever since she was a little girl. We also worried, from past experience, that you would want to confirm anything we said with Pearl herself. We had no idea how bad things would get and the price you would have to pay. We are sincerely sorry.

Pearl continues to struggle with schizophrenia, but as the years have gone by the doctors have been better at prescribing her medications. There were times when she was so heavily medicated there was no "Pearl" there. She acknowledges there's something wrong in her mind but not that her reactions or feelings are wrong, and she strongly believes she has been wronged from the time she was born. Sadly, the spark that was Pearl—the happy, joyful, funny Pearl—is gone.

About the Author

Derrick King was born in Newfoundland in 1954, a fifth-generation Canadian with a pioneer's gene for adventure. He earned his BAsC(EE) from the University of British Columbia in 1977 and his MBA from Simon Fraser University in 1988. He left Canada because of the events described in this book and never returned there to live. He lived in the Netherlands, Japan, Australia, India, and Singapore while raising a family. He studied at INSEAD in Fontainebleau and the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro and was seconded to the World Bank in Poland several times. He retired to philanthropy after 33 years with the same bank. He lives in Southeast Asia with his wife, where he motorcycles, scuba dives, and watches palm trees sway.

ISBN 9789811805745



9 789811 805745



Love for a Deaf Rebel is the true story of a tumultuous romance. With pathos and nostalgia, the author recounts his roller-coaster ride with Pearl, a vivacious deaf maverick, who, unknown to him, had paranoid schizophrenia. We follow their encounters through actual notes written before Derrick learns sign language; we go on their motorcycle ride to Mexico and Guatemala; we watch as the happy couple moves to Bowen Island, a British Columbia community with just three paved roads. Pearl and the author marry and build their dream home and hobby farm. They encounter one obstacle after another while building their life together as Pearl's perception of reality—and, crucially, their perception of each other—begins to change. The author learns what it means to be deaf, what it means to struggle with mental health, and what it means to love such a woman unconditionally—the ecstasy and the agony.